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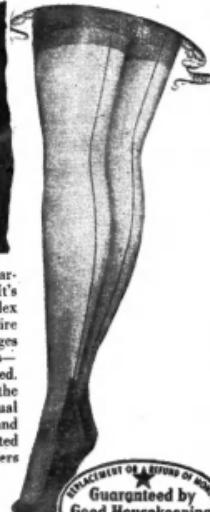
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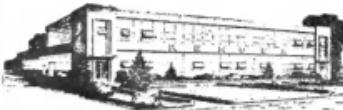
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EXCITING Football

Vol. 4, No. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Fall, 1950

FEATURED GRIDIRON NOVELET



THE HARD-BOILED COACH

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

A dame on his mind, a football in his arms, Johnny Bates is thrown for a total loss—until Coach Hunker Holliday plans a psychological shot in the arm that's not in any rule book!

11

TWO OTHER COMPLETE NOVELETS

TOUCHDOWN CHORUS

Sam Merwin, Jr.

46

As the coach of Sentinel, Al Jeffries' chief worry was how to crack Kingston's baffling defense—and he suspected his pretty wife knew the answer!

THE GLORY ROAD

William O'Sullivan

64

Johnny Gerrard was ruled by the System, and he played it straight down the line—until the day he decided it might not be so bad to lose a game!

FIVE SHORT STORIES

MY FUTURE JUST PASSED

Richard Brister 37

Eddie thought he was through as a player—but he wouldn't say die

A GOAL TO GAIN

Herbert L. McNary 84

Mark Cannon was the season's hero—and he wasn't proud of it

BUCKSHOT IN THE BACKFIELD

W. C. Tuttle 99

When P. U. plays U. P., it's strictly murder, mayhem—and laughs!

SIX POINT ENGINEER

Edward Howey 109

Sophomore sensation Borfel had a weak spot that was made of—iron!

LUCKY STIFF

Kenny Kenmare 118

Chris gets a chance to prove that anybody can be a star

FEATURES

THE KICK-OFF

Cap Fanning 6

THRILLS IN FOOTBALL

Jack Kofoed 95

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The KICK-OFF

A DEPARTMENT FOR ALL
GRIDIRON FANS

Conducted by CAP FANNING

WE'RE going to talk about the fine art of blocking this time. For blocking, since it is the means of getting the offense under way, to say nothing of protecting the runner in the later stages of a successful play, is the actual core of football.

Briefly, for the benefit of any utterly uninitiated readers, blocking is the use by all offensive players save the ball carrier of any or all parts of the body except the hands to keep would-be tacklers away from him.

There are as many types of blocks as there are styles of attack in football. To name a few there are the "brush" block, in which the tackler is just sufficiently jarred off balance to let the runner past—the "shoulder" block, in which he is shoved back out of the runner's way—the "rolling" block, in which, if successfully executed, the tackler is dumped on the seat of his lastest britches—the "cross" block, which is either a one or two-man operation—and scores of others.

The Basic Purpose

All have the same basic purpose—to keep the tackler away from the ball carrier, be he runner, passer or kicker. Every other portion of the lineman's or backfield interferer's usually intricate play-assignment is secondary. He is performing to see that those allotted to advancing the ball have an unimpeded chance to do so.

Naturally the usual nine or ten blockers involved in every defensive play are anonymous. For gallery and sportswriters and radio broadcasters and TV dittoes must perforce keep their attention focused on the ball itself and the man or men who handle it on every play.

On the defensive, unless a play is one of those line-plunge pile-ups reminiscent of a rugby scrum in which all involved are perfectly nameless, the player or players who make the tackle are very much in evidence to the onlookers. And both radio and TV announcers usually call their names to the listening fans.

But they almost never call the name of the key blocker on a play—or even his number. As a matter of fact they can't.

For the key-block that turned the runner loose for a spectacular gain, or allowed the pass receiver to burst through a knot of secondary defenders, may well have been some obscure "brush" affair occurring behind the line of scrimmage. Or it might have been a mousetrap unnoticed in the excitement or a bit of double-teaming that set the line backer-up on his ear.

As a rule only coaches and scouts, more interested in team execution than in ball handling and trained and geared to look for such symptoms, are able to put their fingers on what actually made the successful play click. And sometimes they fail to spot the decisive bit of work.

Limelight on a Blocker

Once in a while a blocker emerges from the alphabet soup of numbered jerseys to find the limelight bathing him brightly for the multitudes. Usually this happens only in the case of some vastly spectacular running star. Thus we find Jack Britton's name forever coupled with that of Red Grange, Forrest Evashevski with Tom Harmon's.

At such times the football fan who wishes to appear discerning above the average usu-

ally says, "All right, so Grange is a great ball carrier—but I'd like to see him score those touchdowns without Britton clearing the way for him."

Usually his remark meets with approval and assent. There is talk of the unsung work of the blockers and the unfair glory reaped by the men they help to spring loose in a broken field. It is generally assumed that the blocker in question is getting very much the dirty end of the stick.

Actually these well-wishers could scarcely be more wrong. For when a blocker attains the white light of publicity it is only because a Grange or a Harmon has made it possible. It is the great runner who makes the great blocker rather than the reverse.

Defensive Halfback

Consider the position of a defensive halfback, say, when the opposition cuts a runner loose in or outside end on his side of the field with a blocker in front of him. His job is to get past the blocker and either bring the runner to earth or drive him out of bounds—whichever promises to cost his side the less yardage and make a touchdown run the less likely should he fail.

Let's say the runner in this instance is a competent if not extraordinary runner—a sound varsity man but no super-star. The defensive halfback is able to put all his attention on getting past the blocker—which he has a better-than-ever chance of doing thanks to having the use of his hands—and then to move in on the ball-carrier himself, the ultimate target.

He concentrates on eluding the blocker, does so and is able to check the advance of the enemy. At which point some of the more enlightened onlookers usually mutter dire things about "lousy blocking."

Tain't so, McGee. The blocker had less than a fifty-fifty chance of completing his assignment under the circumstances and his failure was to be expected.

But let's say the runner is a Grange or a Harmon—a man so fast, so wily, so hard to bring down when trapped that he represents an imminent touchdown threat with every step he takes while carrying the ball.

Your defensive halfback is aware of this threat and his attention is focused entirely on the man who, all things being equal, can outrun or outmaneuver him. He is not going to be able to concentrate even briefly on evading

[Turn page]

"You ought to get a medal!"



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the block the interferer in front of the play is preparing to throw at him.

Result—more often than not the blocker is going to knock him kicking.

They Deserve the Credit

So when you hear people wondering why great runners get the lion's share of the credit, don't begrudge it to them. It takes a great runner to bring his interferer's name into the public eye. And it is your star who is constantly running the greater chance of injury. The opposition is gunning for him, not for the man who clears a path for him to do his stuff in.

As a matter of fact, while blocking may be unrewarding in the record books or in national publicity, it is not especially dangerous. It's just a rugged job that somebody has to do. And most school, college and professional athletes are too anxious to get into the game, to help their teams win, to boggle about doing it. They may not become famous but they're apt to keep their health longer.

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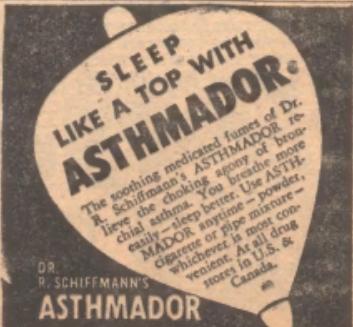
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A NOVELET BY **ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN**

*A dame on his mind, Johnny Bates seems thrown
for a total loss—until Coach Hunker
Holliday plans a psychological
shot in the arm for him!*



The **HARD-BOILED COACH**

CHAPTER I

Fly in the Ointment

HUNTER-COACH HUNKER HOLLIDAY of the New York Panthers was a giant of a man, with shaggy black hair, a granite-block jaw, a pair of eyes that could read the label on your underwear, and a heart that could be the size of a pea or a watermelon, depending upon the occasion. It was the size of nothing at all as he blew a terrific blast on his whistle and stomped across the rock-hard frozen surface of the Polo Grounds.

The twenty-two men in Panther uniforms ceased all activity and stood waiting in weary silence. Holliday came to a halt and let the whistle drop from his lips and dangle at the end of its chain, while he

glared at the group that was his regular starting team.

"Dandy, just dandy!" he threw it at them scornfully. "I go half blind scouting the Eagle pass plays, but I might just as well tell them to a lot of stuffed dummies! What do we do tomorrow—get them to promise to run 'em all through the line?"

The big man let the question hang in the frosty air and stood challenging any comments. There were none forthcoming and Holliday took another breath.

"All right, we'll run it again!" he barked. "And again and again, even if you're still here when the whistle blows tomorrow! Get going!"

With a gesture of his big fist for emphasis, Holliday turned on his heel and walked to the side lines while the regulars silently lined up and B team moved into the pretense of a huddle. Joe Nason, the big left tackle, looked at Johnny Bates and winked.

"I'm dead on my feet," he grunted, "so let's cross them up with Sixty-two."

"You crazy?" Bates snapped. "Why?"

"Obvious," Nason said and moved a hand. "If we score—and we should, with them figuring on the pass—Hunker will see red and kill each of the bums personally. Then we can go home."

"Out," Bates told him firmly. "I'm the new boy, remember? I want to play in at least one game before I die. Nothing doing!"

"Okay," Nason sighed. "But you're going to wish you'd switched. The money boys are very unhappy."

"Let's go," Bates said, and broke up the huddle.

THEY shuffled to their places and Johnny bent down behind big Cordon over the ball. For a brief instant he glanced at the faces of the regulars and his throat went a little bone-dry and tight. Something he saw made him think of Nason's words. The Eagle pass play was tricky against a team that didn't know for sure what was coming, but against eleven giants who knew for a

certainty it could be just plain slaughter.

This was the tenth time Holliday had ordered him to run it against the regulars, and there was something ominously suggestive about the number "ten." Like eight, nine, ten, and *blam*!

A few moments later he called the count, and on the toss from center faked taking the ball and twisting for a quarterback sneak. Instead, he twisted around and raced empty-handed out into the right flat, while the ball spun back to Baker at full. At a certain point he stopped short and turned around. The flat pass from Baker was already in the air and coming at him like a bullet. He caught it, danced back a single step and cocked his arm.

"Way down on the thirty he saw Schultz dancing into the clear. He brought his arm forward and let the pass go. His fingers were still touching leather when the vast empty stands of the Polo Grounds toppled over and smothered him in thundering darkness.

Bates woke up while Nason, Baker, and a couple others were carrying him into the dressing room. By the time he reached there he had all of his wind back and most of his brains. He resisted when they tried to stretch him out on the rubbing table.

"I'm okay," he heard himself say. "What happened?"

"Nothing I didn't say would," Joe Nason grunted. "Now, get up there and let Doc—"

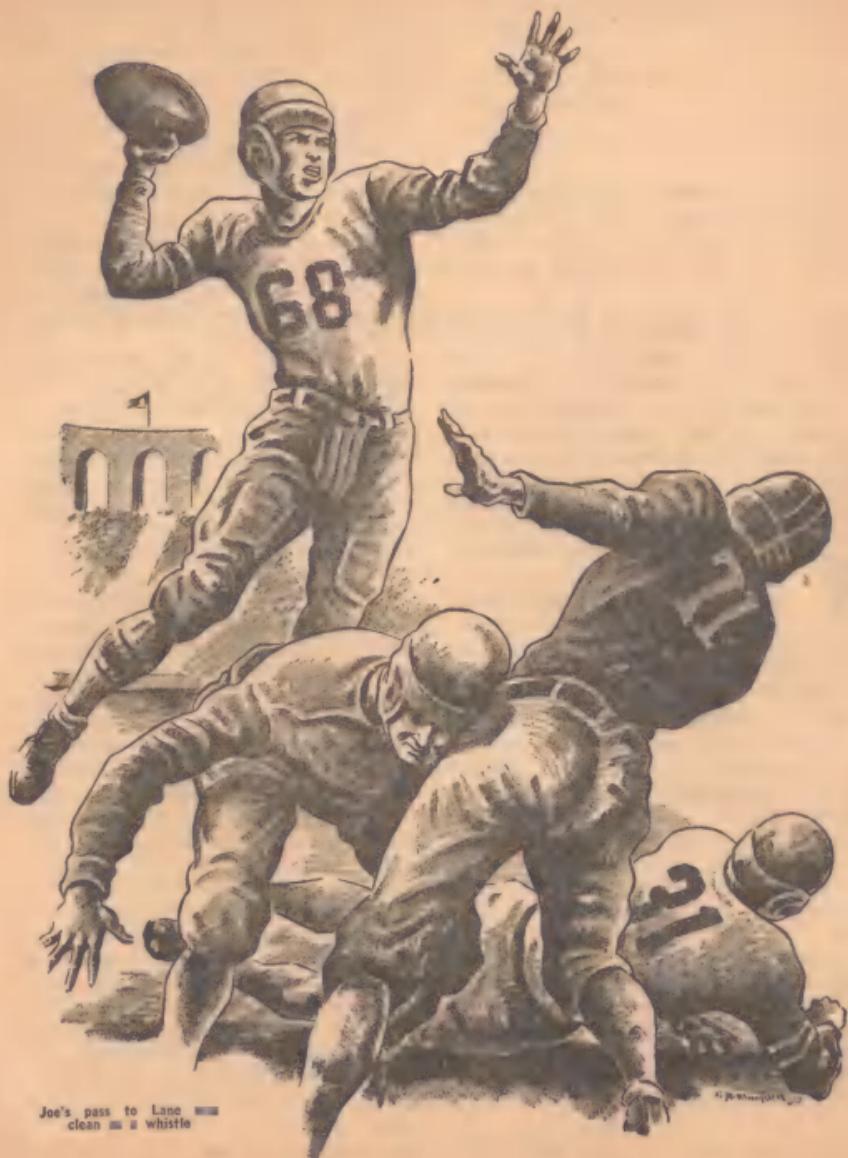
Bates shook his head firmly. By then all his brains were back in place and he felt no more the worse for wear than if he'd been kicked in the stomach by a mule. By then, too, everybody was trudging into the dressing room. Hunker Holliday was the last to show up, and he stomped straight into his office, slamming the door behind him.

"Practice over?" Bates murmured.

"Yes," Nason said, and grinned. "One thing, you gained the same end, anyway."

"Did what?" Bates asked and blinked.

"Schultz went over without a hand on him," the big tackle explained. "Hunker



Joe's pass to Lane —
clean as a whistle

EXCITING FOOTBALL MAGAZINE

was ~~so~~ mad, he lost his voice. So he waved everybody off the field and here we are. That was a beautiful pitch, boy!"

"Thanks," Johnny grunted, and made a face. "I make them like that always. In practice!"

Nason laughed and slapped him on the back.

"Cheer up," he said. "In twenty years Jackson will be fifty. Then you'll be a cinch to take over, if you've lasted. Now, go soak the body. You didn't get hit with creampuffs."

With a final slap, big Nason went over to his locker and Bates went over to his own. Slowly he stripped off his sweat-soaked gear, trying not to think about the mule's hoof that seemed to be still stuck in his stomach. When he finally walked toward the shower room a hand reached out and stopped him. The hand belonged to "Cherry" Jackson, the Panthers' stellar quarterback and main turnstile attraction for the past six years.

"Nice passing arm you've got, Bates," he said. "How's for letting me borrow it tomorrow?"

"Sure, if the rest of me goes with it," the new man told him, and kept on toward the shower room.

When he finally came out, most everybody else was dressed and gone. Bates put ~~on~~ his street clothes slowly and stared every now and then at the closed door of Holliday's office. When he was fully dressed, he had made up his mind. He went over to the door, knocked, got ~~a~~ loud grunt from within, and opened the door.

"Got a minute, Coach?" he asked.

Holliday turned his big head, glared.

"Come in, Bates," he said in ~~a~~ voice that crossed up his glare. "What do you want?"

"It's about tomorrow's game, Coach."

"What about it?"

BATES took a quick lick of his lips and swallowed. "I'm wondering," the second-string quarterback said, and

promptly shook his head. "I mean, I've been with the club for five games now, but all I've played was seven minutes of the first one. When I signed—well, I thought it would work out a little different."

Holliday held his glare and his thick lips tightened.

"How different?" he said. "That I'd bench Jackson and let ~~a~~ man fresh from college run my team—that it?"

"Not exactly," Bates fumbled with the words. "But seven minutes out of five games, I'm not beginning to earn my salary! I want to play some football. I've got ~~a~~ reason."

"Everybody has reasons for everything, Bates," Holliday said flatly. "Including me. The reason for keeping you on the bench while Jackson's out there playing? One, people pay our salaries to see Jackson play. And two, no football coach living is sure what tomorrow may bring."

"What does that mean?" Bates wanted to know.

"It means," the Panthers' owner-coach said patiently, "that should Jackson drop dead, or get lost, or quit, or get his neck broken by the opposition, I've got a pretty good quarterback to rush right in there. You! Now, just hold your horses. Your chance will come, sometime. Pro football is different from college stuff. We don't go all out for the little brown jug. We go for the cash, and while they're around it's players like Jackson who make the cash registers ring up the dollars and cents. However, you'll get your chance, sometime. Now, anything else?"

Johnny took ~~a~~ deep breath, hesitated, and shook his head. "No, sir, I guess not," he said, and went out of the office.

An hour later Bates entered the Hotel Belmore cocktail lounge and immediately spotted Jane Carter waiting for him at ~~a~~ table for two in ~~a~~ secluded corner.

As always, the very sight of her stopped his breath and started the goose pimples parading over his big frame.

Pretty ■ a picture, and desirable ■ four touchdowns against Notre Dame, he had met Jane at ■ dance in his senior year at Stanford U. On that evening romance had budded, and it had been blossoming ever since.

Shortly after graduation, however, ■ fly had dropped into the sweet ointment. Having majored in architecture at Stanford, Bates had been offered ■ job with a well-known New York firm at a starting salary that would enable him to get by, provided he didn't eat too often. And in keeping with that stroke of luck for him, ■ Gotham fashion-designing house had liked Jane's work and offered her ■ job at ■ somewhat similar salary.

So it had been agreed between them—in a year's time each would most certainly have secured ■ firm foothold, and they could get married without the fear of possibly disproving the adage that two could eat as cheaply as one.

But came the fly into the ointment—an offer from the New York Panthers to Johnny to play for more money in a single season than he could earn architecting in three years. Naturally he had jumped at the opportunity and signed in ■ hurry. Then he told Jane, and found out!

College football she could take with the eagerest undergraduate, or alumnus fan. But professional football, no! That was a different bag of apples. All-American quarterback three years running was enough gridiron glory for the man she was to marry, in her opinion. Pro football was out, regardless of the money. Too risky. In a single game he could be injured for keeps, and it would be the end almost before the beginning.

He had majored in architecture ■ a means toward an end, had he not? And the firm that wanted to hire him was famous for pushing their younger talent forward. So he might struggle for ■ year, perhaps two years. But the future was secure. And ■ forth and so on.

All arguments to the contrary had bounced off the steel wall of her resistance. No thoughts of marriage so long

as he played pro football. That was that!

All right, then. She would wait out the season, ■ he begged her to do. Perhaps the money he made would be enough for him to set up his own little business, as he certainly intended to do eventually. But it was still 'silly, and he was actually wasting a very useful year in his life.

CHAPTER II

Jane Lays Down the Law

SUCH was the situation ■ Bates walked across the lounge, sat down across from her and said, "Hi, Jane!"

She gave him enough of a smile to be called one.

"Hello, Johnny. I was beginning to think I'd have to pay my own check."

He gave an order for two martinis to a hovering waiter and grinned at her.

"Hunker kept us ■ little late," he explained. "Polishing the rough spots for the Eagles."

She looked at the big bruise on the side of his face and the beginning of a black eye and sniffed faintly. "What did they use you for today? A tackling dummy?"

"We all took turns," he chuckled. "The money boys were a little unhappy about things."

"And how is the wonderful Mr. Jackson?" she asked sweetly. "Broke his classic neck, I hope!"

He laughed, and reached across and covered one of her hands with his big paw.

"You have Cherry all wrong, Jane," he said. "It's the other way around. I'm the guy after his job."

"When?" she said firmly.

"Aw, look, Jane! My big chance will come. And I still get the salary check. Look, baby, I—"

"No"—more firmly.

"What?"

"I don't feel like talking about it, Johnny. I'm tired."

The little bug of fright bit him and he stared at her earnestly. "What's the matter, honey? Something go wrong at the office?"

She waited while the waiter served them, and then shook her head.

"Quite the contrary," she said.

"Good! But what does that mean? Hey! A raise?"

She looked at him for a moment and he melted all apart inside.

"Even better," she finally told him. "An offer of a wonderful job with Baker and Tobin."

He squeezed her hand and saluted her with his drink.

"Swell! Who are they?"

"Only the biggest fashion house in Chicago."

Johnny Bates slowly lowered his glass to the table and wiped a couple of drops off his chin.

"Did you say Chicago?"

"That's right. I can start the first of next month. Seventy-five dollars a week, Johnny. Well, aren't you glad for me?"

He shook himself and came up for air.

"Sure! Sure, you bet! It's wonderful! But Jane, what about us? I mean—well, you in Chicago and me here? Look, baby, it's—"

The movement of her pretty head and the light in her eyes stopped him like an eleven-man line.

"You look, Johnny. We agreed to the year, didn't we? Well, it's as fair for me as it is for you. Do you expect me to let opportunity slide by while I wait for you to realize your big mistake?"

"But it's not a mistake, baby! So Hunker hasn't used me much yet, but I'm putting money in the bank. Don't you see? It's not really a year. Only to the end of the season. Just a few weeks more."

"When the season's over come to Chicago, Johnny."

"Jane, honey, you don't mean it!"

Her eyes flashed anger for an instant and then they were a little starry and

misty. She made an impulsive movement of her hand across the table as she spoke softly.

"I know we love each other, but it has to be more than just that, darling. A basic understanding of things really important—that, we haven't got. I wonder if we ever will. Perhaps I'll see things different in Chicago. I don't know, but I guess I hope so a little. And as you say, it's just a few weeks. Believe me, Johnny, I couldn't turn this chance down and be satisfied with myself. So you finish the season, and then come to Chicago and we'll talk."

"No," he said flatly. "We'll talk now. Tonight, anyway. Where do you want to eat, honey?"

She had finished her drink and was putting on her gloves.

"I don't," she said. "I'm really tired. Besides, there are some sketches I must have ready by Monday. No, not tonight, Johnny."

To argue was futile. That much, experience had taught him. He drained his own glass and signaled for the check.

"What about the game tomorrow?" he said. "You'll be there?"

"Please, Johnny," she said gently. "For three games I nearly froze to death watching you sitting all wrapped in a blanket on the bench. No, thank you. Besides, I have the sketches to do."

He put a bill on the table and followed her across the lounge, his heart a badly battered pulp.

RIDING the subway uptown to the Polo Grounds next day, Johnny Bates tried to concentrate on the advertising cards clipped in place on the opposite side of the car, but it was futile. Superimposed over the lot of them was Jane Carter's face—the way she crinkled her nose when something pleased her, the way her violet-blue eyes changed to black when he displeased her, and all the little gestures and mannerisms that spoke far more than mere words.

Along about Ninety-sixth Street he gave it up and closed his eyes. The ad-

vertising cards disappeared but Jane's face remained. And the wheels on the rails clacked out the sound, Chicago, Chicago, Chicago! It was like an unbelievable nightmare repeating itself. Jane going to Chicago! Going away from him! Jane sitting pretty in Chicago, and he sitting on the Panther bench!

Wait, maybe that was it. Five games he'd ridden the bench, save for seven minutes, and maybe he'd ride the bench for the rest of them. So maybe that was what hurt Jane the most—his getting no place fast, just collecting money for doing nothing.

If he could get into the games and do things, it might offer a different slant. All dames were funny about some things. Jane hadn't wanted him to become a pro in the first place, and maybe just sitting the bench was the last straw. No get-up and go like a woman wants in her man.

Perhaps if he could just change that, the Chicago thing wouldn't seem worth beans. After all it was Jane and him, wasn't it? Or, was it? Chicago was full of a lot of unmarried guys, too!

Along about then the train rumbled into the Polo Grounds stations and he opened his eyes and came out of the unhappy trance. Most of the Panthers were there in the dressing room in various stages of dress and undress when he came in. As he walked toward his locker, big Joe Nason stopped him. There was a grin on the tackle's face, but a critical look in his eyes.

"You look beat up, chum," he said. "All that from just yesterday? Or was it a late night?"

"From yesterday," Johnny said and looked toward Holliday's office. "Hunker in?"

"Yes. But why?"

"I want to get in today's game," Johnny said firmly. "I'm sick of sitting the bench!"

"You're sick?" Nason snorted. "For me, it's the second year! Don't be a dope."

"I'm not!" Johnny growled.

Big Nason nodded slowly.

"You will be if you talk to Hunker," he said. "One thing the boss-man doesn't like is to be pressed. Especially on game day. Just relax and hope like me and the others. These Eagles are tough cookies. Might be they'll flatten lots of our money boys in the first half, then it'll be us. See?"

"No, Joe, I want to play today," Johnny repeated. "I've got to! It means—well, I've just got to play."

Nason frowned, and pursed his lips as he stared into Bates' strained face. Then, suddenly, he knew he had it.

"It's that dame, isn't it?" he challenged. "That Jane Carter you took me to meet one time? You got to play to show her all pro players don't stink, huh?"

Johnny felt the blood rush into his face and anger slide through him. Joe Nason had become his first friend on the Panthers and had taught him a lot of helpful things about the cash-and-carry game. He had grown very fond of the big lad and in a thoughtless moment had invited Joe to have dinner with Jane and himself.

It had turned out a slightly painful ordeal for the three of them. Jane had been polite like a gilded cake of ice, and the fact that Nason couldn't seem to talk about anything but the Panthers and pro football in general hadn't helped things at all. That had been Bates' one and final effort to have Jane meet his business associates.

He stared into Nason's face now and grinned miserably.

"That's right," he said. "Jane's taking a new job in Chicago."

"Fine!" Nason cried, and beamed. "Sure, and there's inspiration for you, Johnny. If we win the league title we'll be playing for the national crown in Chicago. What could be better?"

Johnny started to speak and then changed his mind.

"Skip it," he said. "You don't understand, Joe."

Nason frowned and dragged a hand down the side of his face.

"Maybe not," he grunted. "But this I do, Johnny. Don't go busting in on Hunker right now. Since yesterday he's been very unsociable and getting worse. In his mood, for pennies he'd tear up Cherry's contract, let alone yours or mine. Leave him be, Johnny."

Bates scowled and glanced about the dressing room.

"Speaking of Jackson, where is he?" he murmured.

Joe Nason shrugged and fell to lacing his hip pads.

"He'll be around," he grunted. "But if not, will that make you mad? Go get into your suit. Maybe Hunker's wondering, too, and making up his mind. It'll help to be in your suit."

JOHNNY hesitated, then grinned at Nason and went over to his locker. He dressed slowly, forcing his mind to be a blank, but every now and then he shot a look at Holliday's closed office door, or looked about to see if Cherry Jackson had shown up yet.

Just before the entire squad was about to go out on the field for limbering up, the main door opened and Jackson came breezing in.

"Here I am, brother slaves!" the back-field star greeted the room. "Is everybody happy?"

Nobody answered, perhaps because at that exact moment Holliday's door slammed open and the big man came stomping out. He took a couple of steps, stopped and glared at Jackson.

"Thanks for showing up!" he bit off.

Jackson stared at him in mild surprise and laughed.

"Why, Hunker, don't I always?"

The owner-coach of the Panthers seemed to bare his white teeth for a brief instant.

"There may come a day," he growled. "Right now, get into your suit, and then I want to talk to you. The rest of you, get out there now . . . Bates, run signals until Jackson comes out. Routine stuff, understand?"

"Yes sir!" Johnny gulped, and felt his

heart lift three inches.

For thirty full minutes Johnny Bates lived in his wonderful world of make-believe. He called signals, passed and punted for the regulars while thousands of football fans looked on and waited. Then Cherry Jackson came trotting onto the field and the mighty roar at his appearance made the Polo Grounds' pigeons flutter up in clouds.

"Thanks, pal," Jackson said, and slapped Johnny affectionately on the back. "Got them all nice and warmed up, eh? Good. Now get yourself a rest, my boy."

Quick anger tied Johnny's stomach into knots but he kept it out of his face, and even grinned as he turned and trotted over to the side lines. There he joined Nason and some of the others passing a ball back and forth. Presently the field was cleared save for the two team captains and the officials.

About then Hunker Holliday put in an appearance, and he passed within a foot of Bates as he went to his usual place at the north end of the bench. Sudden impulse stirred Johnny, but a hand gripping his arm killed it.

"It wouldn't do any good, Johnny," Joe Nason murmured. "Really it wouldn't. Come on, let's sit down where we can see things."

Johnny shrugged and let Nason lead him over to a place on the bench, a good dozen players removed from the scowling, granite-jawed Holliday. The big tackle even draped a blanket about him and patted his knee.

"Just sit tight and hope, chum," he murmured. "Look at them gorillas! Outweigh us fifteen pounds a man, if an ounce!"

Bates looked across to where the Eagles were receiving last-minute instructions from their mentor, and silently agreed. The biggest bunch he'd ever seen on any football field. And not only big but good, too, as their record to date of five straight wins proved.

By a coincidence, that was the same as the Panthers' record to date. And so

this game for both teams could mean a long step toward the league title and the contest for the national crown. Big lads, yes, Bates thought, but if say six of them should happen to fall on Cherry Jackson's neck—

The toss had been won by the Panthers and they elected to kick off. For the next couple of minutes Holliday went into a final huddle with his first string, and then sent them out. Another two minutes and "Jocko" Lane, the Panther captain, moved forward to boot the ball and the rough and tumble was on.

CHAPTER III

"Get In There For Jackson!"

THE KICKOFF was taken on the seven by the Eagle full. He danced around a couple of seconds to let his interference form and then started forward. He got to the fifteen and was dumped there so hard that time out was called while the ball carrier got his wind back. That was the beginning of things and gave a very clear idea of the general pattern to follow.

The Eagles got to the twenty and had to punt. Jocko Lane caught it on his twenty and brought it back seven yards. Cherry Jackson took over then and there was a mounting murmur from the big crowd, expecting big things.

They got action, but nothing big. The Eagles had obviously been drilled silly against the Panther passing attack. They went through the line as if nothing was there, and brushed Jackson's screen aside to spill him twice for a total loss of nine yards. One play through the line got back eight of those yards, but on the next down Jackson punted to the Eagle forty-one, where the ball receiver was promptly dropped flat on his face.

A line buck by the Eagles netted two and then they took to the air, but with only slightly better results than the

Panthers. They finally were forced to kick, and that's just about the way it went for the remainder of the opening quarter—a tussle between the two forty-yard-line stripes.

During the time interval, while the teams changed goals, Jackson trotted over to the bench for a helmet to replace the one he was wearing. The star player passed directly in front of Bates, and Johnny was startled by the look on Jackson's face. It was strained and almost dead-white under the smears of grime and dirt. And there was a sort of glazed light in Jackson's eyes. But perhaps it was just a crazy impression, Bates thought.

Jackson got his new helmet, spoke a word or two to Holliday, and then grinned cheerfully and went trotting out onto the field again.

The second quarter went along more or less the same business between the forty-yard stripes. But at about the eighth minute of play the Eagles suddenly caught the fever and their attack began to click with machinelike precision. From their own thirty-eight they reeled off three first downs in a row that placed the ball on the Panther thirty-one. There the Panthers dug in and stopped two plays for a gain of only one yard. Then a beautiful screened jump-pass made it another first down on the Panther twelve.

A forward pass into the end zone went incomplete. Next the Eagles went to the line and made it third and four on the six. And then came the first break of the game, and it was for the Panthers.

The Eagle full went through a wide-open hole at right tackle but tripped over his feet, or somebody else's, and by magic the ball squirted out of his arms to roll loose on the ground. A tangle of players fell on it, but when the referee untangled the pile-up there was Jocko Lane grimly hugging the pigskin to his sturdy breast.

The recovery was made on their own three and the Panthers took no chances, not with the way those big Eagles could

crash through. Cherry Jackson kicked, and it was a beautiful one for sixty-nine yards. A runback gained just twelve inches, and the Eagles started to work all over again. But the driving touch was momentarily gone, somehow. Or rather, perhaps the Panthers had been touched by it. They allowed only six yards and the Eagles kicked on fourth down and four.

It was a short kick that went only to the Panther forty-two and into the outstretched arms of Cherry Jackson, racing over the frozen turf at top speed. And perhaps it was that running start that made it all possible.

At any rate, the Panthers' pay-dirt man raced and twisted through the entire Eagle team. On the one-yard line he was grabbed, but momentum carried his tackler, himself and the ball over into the end zone for six points. Jackson then booted it between the uprights for the extra point.

Three minutes later the half ended, with the Eagles having brought the kickoff back from the thirteen to their own forty-eight.

IN THE dressing room, Hunker Holliday was a walking talking-machine. As the players draped themselves here and there, getting back their wind and building up new energy for the second half, Holliday maintained a running fire of comment.

It was almost as though his brain had taken a picture of every single play and all the details were clearly developed on the screen of his memory. He pointed out flaws in offense and defense of both teams, chances that were tossed away, minor mistakes that were made, and a host of other things.

Listening to him, Johnny Bates marveled that one man could retain so much in his mind. However, that was but one of the many qualities that had made Holliday perhaps the greatest football man ever to coach a pro team. Everybody listened attentively, most of them with their heads down and their eyes fixed on

the floor. Line and backfield alike had absorbed a terrific beating from the Eagles, and any extra second of complete relaxation was at least a little something gained for them.

Cherry Jackson in particular bore the marks of a solid thirty minutes of football. Staring closely at him, Bates once again saw the strange light in the man's eyes and the not-too-healthy coloring in his face. Yet every now and then the flashy quarterback would lift his head and grin at something Holliday said, and at such times he looked no more the worse for wear than any of the others. Once when Jackson looked up he caught Johnny's eye and winked broadly, for whatever that was supposed to mean.

"All right," Holliday wound up when someone thrust a head in the door to announce the half time about up. "You've got one big one, so go out and get another for good measure. And watch that halfback Pauling. He's getting into every play. Bury him six feet down, if you have to, but keep him out of the way. Okay, let's wrap it up!"

Back on the bench, with the ever-present Nason sitting at his side, Bates watched the Eagles kick off to the Panther three-yard line. Cherry Jackson gathered in the ball and with a roar mounting upward from the stands, the flashy quarterback started on his way. With some help by nice blocking he crossed the twenty and went tightroping the side line to the twenty-five. There he pivoted and cut diagonally across the field in an effort to slip by two Eagles bearing down on him. He almost got into the clear, but not quite.

The two Eagles hit him and the impact of the three bodies could be heard up in the stands. As if the half-frozen ground had dropped away from under them, the three tumbled flat with Jackson underneath. When the two Eagles got to their feet and Jackson still lay there unmoving, thousands of people caught their breath.

But it was only for a few seconds. Jackson got to his feet then, nodded

that he was okay, and then clapped his hands for the Panthers to huddle.

They came out of it fast and lined up, and Johnny Bates suddenly sensed the play that was coming up. Jackson was following Holliday's request without wasting any time. With the ball on their own twenty-six, Jackson was going to try the out-of-the-hat pass. It was one of those desperation plays to be tried when you were fighting the clock, but here Jackson was pulling it with only a few minutes of the second half ticked away.

Hunkered down over the center he barked the count, and with the snap of the ball he spun and raced for the left flat. At a point back of tackle he reversed his course and cut around the other way. As a result, he crossed behind Lane, who had taken the ball and was holding a Statue of Liberty stance.

On the dead run, Jackson took the ball from Lane's outstretched hand and ran on parallel into the right flat. There he halted and cocked his arm, and Stacey, the end, was sixty yards down the field without an Eagle near him.

It couldn't miss, but it did. In that fatal split-second before the ball was on its way, Pauling of the Eagles got through and hurled himself at Jackson. The Panther quarter hit the ground as though he had been swung down by the heels. He rolled over twice and the ball trickled away from him. Fortunately for the Panthers, Jocko Lane was over in time to fall on it and hug it close.

A BREATHLESS silence settled over the Polo Grounds and every eye was clamped on Cherry Jackson, stretched flat and face down. Everybody on the Panther bench was on his feet, and without waiting for any signal Doc Hall grabbed up his bag and ran out.

He was only halfway there when Jackson got slowly onto his feet. With Jocko Lane holding him, he walked around a bit. Then Doc Hall came up and those on the bench saw him shake his head, take Jackson's arm and lead him toward the side lines.

The star quarterback looked like he had fallen from a six-story window, but there was a silly grin on his face as he looked at Holliday.

"Hi, Hunker, you old slave-driver! What the devil is—"

There wasn't any more. Mouth open and his face dead-white under the dirt, Jackson suddenly clutched at his middle with both hands and crumpled to the ground before anybody was quick enough to catch him. Hunker Holliday groaned, swore through his teeth, and moved back to give Doc Hall more room.

"Bates!"

Johnny saw Holliday's lips move, heard the sound and even knew what it meant, but somehow his feet were rooted to the ground where he stood and the sides of his throat were pressed flat to stop off all sound.

"Bates! Come here!"

That released the trance. Johnny let

[Turn page]

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the blanket slide from his shoulders and walked over. Holliday took him by the arm in a grip of steel and walked him a few steps.

"You've begged for it and here it is!" the owner-coach snapped. "Get in there for Jackson, and stay in there. You know the plays, or should. Heaven help your hide if you don't! Let their line alone, unless there's nothing else. Pass them silly, but watch that Pauling. You tell Lane I want a three-man screen. The hell with their line! We can't hold them, anyway. Okay, get cracking!"

The slap Johnny got on the back almost sent him to his knees. He caught himself in time, tugged at his helmet strap and ran out onto the field. If any cheers greeted his appearance, he didn't hear them. The blood was up in his head and drowning out all other noise.

His first reaction in the huddle was that of a little boy in the midst of strangers. Everybody just looked at him, more or less expressionless. He licked his lips and told them Holliday's order.

"All right, you'll get the screen," Jocko Lane grunted. "But get it away fast. These bums have greased pants. . . . All right, Bates, give us Twenty-one."

They broke out of the huddle and lined up. Johnny took his place back of Morgan, the first-string center, and refused to look across at the Eagles. He called the count, took the ball, and darted back for a quick handoff to Lane. Instead, he kept the ball hidden behind him and went back three more steps.

He turned and saw Krantz, the other end, breaking away from the Eagle secondary. He made the pitch, and in the same instant a runaway locomotive knocked him down. Flat on the ground, with no air in his lungs, he saw Krantz grab the ball and take two steps before he was brought down on the forty for a first down.

"Well, well! So Hunker's finally using the dashing All-American. How nice! Didn't hurt you, did I?"

Through a fog Johnny heard the words. He turned over and looked up

into the grinning face of Pauling, the elusive Eagle halfback. He tried to match the grin, but his mouth hurt where Pauling's knee had kissed it. Instead of wasting breath, he got slowly to his feet and walked away. In the huddle, he looked at Lane.

"How about Forty?" he asked. "My turn to block for you."

The Panther captain considered it for a brief instant and then shrugged.

"Why not?" he said. "Me passing, instead of you, may cross them. Let's go."

Back at the line, Bates called the count and did his stuff as the ball was snapped. He faked taking it and it went back to Lane. The big fullback got set as the Eagles began to pour through.

On that particular play there was only one Eagle on the field for Johnny Bates. He saw Pauling plowing through like a half-crazed fire horse, and threw a block on him with everything he had to throw. Both men crashed to the ground and bounced, but it was Pauling who got up first, even though a little slowly. He sucked air into his lungs, looked at Bates and wagged his head.

"Now don't try to teach Grandma how to suck eggs," he said. "Please don't, sonny!"

CHAPTER IV

By One Point

DUE TO a tricky bit of ground that Stacey, the end, had set his foot on, the pass had gone incomplete, so they lined up to try it again. In the huddle, Johnny said it would be through the strong side with Lane carrying the ball. He called the count that way, and got his second crack at Pauling bulling through.

His block knocked the Eagle flat five feet, but the man stayed upright and managed to haul Lane down right at the

line of scrimmage.

It was then that Holliday started to scrape his bench for the first time. The backfield he left as it was, for the simple reason there was no combination on the bench one bit better, in spite of the pounding the first-stringers had taken. But he did send in five new men for the line, and one was big Joe Nason.

As the team went into the huddle, Nason grinned at Johnny and gave him a whack on the back.

"Told you we'd get in the game if we hoped, didn't I?" he grunted. "Now call one that'll give me a chance to meet that gent Pauling. I don't like what he's doing to my boy."

Johnny called for another pass play. He'd take the handoff, fake to the right and then slip it across to Lane in the opposite flat. It had worked nine out of thirteen times during the season, but Cherry Jackson had been the fair-haired boy on each occasion.

Anyway, he called it, and the thing went off like clockwork. For the first time, Pauling wasn't jumping on his chest and his pass to Lane was clean as a whistle. The Panther captain went eleven yards for another first down, but that was only half the joy for Johnny. The other half was the way Joe Nason had upended Pauling and flopped him flat.

As a matter of fact, the Eagles had to call time out while their trainer decided if the flashy halfback should stay in the game. He finally okayed him, and the crowd gave Pauling a tremendous hand as the Eagle player put his helmet back on and went to his defensive position. Nason grinned at Johnny.

"Just the chance, that's all we needed," the big tackle chuckled. "And is Hunker realizing that now! Okay, let's have a touchdown. I haven't seen one from here all season!"

With the ball first and ten on the Eagle forty-eight, Johnny Bates had an inspiration as he went into the huddle. He called the out-of-the-hat pass play that had removed Cherry Jackson from

the game. As he looked at Lane he saw the team captain frowning and biting his lips. Then suddenly the fullback grinned and nodded.

"A deal," he said. "They won't be expecting it from you, so maybe that's what'll make it click. We pull it. Let's go!"

"Take your time, chum," Nason said to Johnny as they broke out of the huddle. "Mr. Pauling is stopping off with me. You make it good and the game's in the dressing room. Right?"

"If you say so," Johnny murmured, and took a breath.

For no reason than perhaps to clamp down a little harder on his jumping nerves, Johnny took a couple of extra seconds before he started the count over Morgan. Let this one click and he could very easily be in clover. Let it go flat and Hunker Holliday could just as easily crucify him for trying to be big-league on his own, despite Captain Jocko Lane's okay of the idea.

He called the count. From that point on it was like a mad, crazy dream, and he was seemingly up there in the seats watching it all in abject horror. He spun as he was supposed to do and broke fast toward the left flat. At tackle he reversed and cut around in back of Lane. Slick as a whistle, he took the ball and there was Stacey waiting in the clear. He cocked his arm and pitched, and it happened!

A half-melted clod of frozen sod under his forward foot gave way and caused his knee to bend. Unable to check it, the ball left his fingers and traveled like a bullet straight into the arms of Pauling, who for some reason had not tried to go through the line this time.

The man gathered it in, a surprised look on his face, and began to run. Not a Panther was even close to him. Not even another Eagle, for that matter. In fact, the only man who stood the ghost of a chance of getting close was Johnny Bates. But stunned horror paralyzed

every muscle in his body for just a split-second too long.

As Pauling galloped by some seven yards away from him, Bates made a desperate dive and simply hit the dirt on his face. Pauling went the rest of the way alone, and it was six points for the Eagles.

FOR A crazy instant Bates longed to stay right where he was, face flat on the ground, while Hunker Holliday bounded out and jumped on his neck with both feet. But he finally forced himself to his feet. By then, Joe Nason had run over and had hold of his arm.

"Just a tough break, Johnny," the tackle was saying. "That's all, just a tough one. It could happen to anybody. Johnny! You want I should hit you?"

The drumming and the roaring in Bates' head faded away and the blood seemed to circulate again. He was as good as ever, save for the pieces of his heart that were scattered all over the Polo Grounds.

"Me, Johnny Bates!" he mumbled thickly. "Didn't I do just fine? Holes in the head I've got!"

"Shut up!" Nason snapped. "Your foot slipped. Everybody saw it. Come on. They only got six points, and we've got seven!"

Not caring to argue or even think, Bates walked downfield to where the two teams were lining up for the goal try. With every step he expected to see somebody come from the bench to take over his spot. Even the water boy, if Hunker didn't have anybody else.

But no substitute came in, and no Panther on the field spoke a word to him or shot him a dirty look. The Eagles had six points up there on the big board and all the words in the world couldn't rub them out.

Meanwhile, Jocko Lane was moving up and down the line like a caged animal, thumping every man on the rear with his half-closed fist.

"Block it, block it!" he chanted. "Get through and smear him!"

The ball was snapped and it wasn't such a hot pass. The Panthers were fighting tooth and nail for the single-point advantage. Big as the Eagle line was, they went tearing through it and Panther hearts sank back into place. The kick was half blocked by Lane, himself, and missed the left upright by yards. The big board still showed the Panthers out in front by a single point.

When the Panthers took their positions to receive the Eagle kickoff, somebody ran out from the bench. Bates' heart skipped a beat. It was a player by the name of Hanson, a blocking back but a man Holliday had had call signals several times in practice sessions. However, Hanson wasn't coming in at quarter. He ran over to Sears at left half and gave him the nod and Sears trotted off.

A moment later the Eagles kicked and Lane took it on his eleven. Johnny ducked over to run interference but he was soon sliding on his ear, and so was Jocko Lane on the nineteen-yard line. In the huddle, Hanson delivered the message he'd brought out.

"Hunker says for you to go to work and run the team," he said to Lane. "Call every play in the huddle, and that's what it's to be."

Nobody said anything. All eyes stared at the ground, but Johnny Bates felt the sting in his face as though it had actually been slapped. It didn't make him mad. He'd had his chance, and from here on in Holliday was playing it absolutely safe.

"Suits me fine," he finally broke the silence. "What's the first call, Jocko?"

Momentarily Lane's face looked embarrassed, and then it hardened.

"Forty-five!" he snapped. "And a couple of you guys get that Pauling out of my way!"

Beginning with play Forty-five, an off-tackle slash with Lane carrying the ball, the Panther captain started functioning just as the canny Holliday had known he would. In other words, Jocko Lane put the rest of the Panthers on his broad shoulders and started toting them down

THE HARD-BOILED COACH

the field.

He carried the ball three times running and made it a first down. Then he switched to the air and carried it himself with an underhand toss from Bates. And then he went at the line again. On their own thirty-five the Eagles stiffened, and Lane was finally forced to punt just as the third quarter ended.

The kick, angled for the corner, missed and went over the line and was brought out to the twenty at the opposite end of the field.

Stung by the single point against them, the Eagle bench threw everything into the fight, but with Lane playing his head off and big Joe Nason putting on one of the finest demonstrations of defensive play seen in the Polo Grounds that season, the Eagle attack bogged down at the midfield stripe and they had to kick.

INCE again Lane took the thing on his big shoulders. True, ten other men in Panther uniforms played right along with him, but it was mostly Jocko. Nearly every play he was the keyman with the ball, and when he wasn't he was spilling Eagles who got in front of the man who was.

But all that and more was not enough. The Eagles rooted their beefy forms to the ground and refused to budge. Several times in the huddles Bates was tempted to suggest some pass play with himself doing the flinging, but he bit his lips instead. If Jocko thought there was a chance he would have called for them before now. Besides, Hunker Holliday had sent in his orders, and the big man was not a person to be crossed up.

Finally, on the Eagle forty-six, the Panthers had to punt. Fresh players came in from the Eagle bench and they went to work with a vengeance. Two yards, three yards, six yards, they moved steadily up the frost-bitten field. On the very pass play that had sent Holliday into fits yesterday, the visitors made it first down again on the Panthers' thir-

ty-seven-yard line.

Then came a break for Holliday's men, or perhaps some magic by big Nason. After taking a quick screen pass, Pauling fumbled and Nason got there first. Lane called time out for a breather and to kiss big Joe, and then they went back to work.

It was nothing fancy. With Cherry Jackson out, Lane couldn't risk anything. He could only hope to make the clock the extra man on his team.

The hand of the clock moved around. Six minutes, five, and four. Then it was three, and then only two. Lane pulled every stalling trick he knew, but he finally had to kick from the midfield stripe.

Pauling, no less, took it on his own goal line and brought it way out to the forty-three before Panther hearts in the stands and on the bench were able to start ticking again. With the ball on the Eagle forty-three and in their possession, the clock hand was touching the one-minute and five-second mark.

On the very first play the Eagles made eight, and then they went through for six and a first down. The Panthers anchored their feet and stopped the next play cold. Then Pauling ripped off another thirteen, and there were eighteen seconds left to go. Time for one play, and maybe two.

The ball was on the thirty but at a bad angle to the goal posts. The Eagle bench sent in their toe artist, but nobody was fooled. From kick-formation the Eagles faked a pass and hit the weak side instead. It was Pauling again and he went straight down the side stripe to the eight, and the Eagle captain stopped the clock.

Three seconds and one more play. A graveyard hush settled over the entire Polo Grounds. The Eagles went into a single-wing shift and the Panthers got set for anything. It was a pass into the end zone, but a few inches too high. Pauling was there and all by himself, but he couldn't get his fingers on it.

The incompletely passed stopped the

clock, but that didn't mean anything. Time had run out and the game was over, with the Panthers still on top by a mere point.

Like a man coming out of a crazy dream, Johnny Bates slowly picked himself up from the sod where somebody had spilled him and walked with the others toward the clubhouse steps way out beyond center field. Some joy over the win trickled through him, but in his heart he was sick. The clock had really beaten the Eagles, he thought. One more play and they might have scored. That plus what he had handed them would have been plenty.

Head sagging and too bruised and battered to do much clear thinking, he trudged into the dressing room and went straight to his locker and started peeling off his suit. There were voices around him but nothing like his Stanford days. It had been a win and that was six straight, and that was very fine. A big step toward the jackpot game. But save your breath and let the guys that bought tickets do the yelling.

The needle-point shower helped a lot but it did nothing to take the ache out of Johnny's heart. What a help he'd been! What a bust! He swung his clenched fists at air and spraying water, and then gave it up. Get dressed, Bates, and out of this place of football men, he told himself.

He towed himself dry and went out to his locker. The room was cleared save for a couple of stragglers. Even Joe Nason was gone. Johnny cursed himself for not telling his friend what a whale of a game he'd played. There was one second-stringer who would be on next Sunday's starting team, and every Sunday after that, unless Holliday had a hole in his head!

"And what are you so unhappy about? Didn't somebody tell you we won?"

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CHAPTER V

Thrown for a Loss

BATES jerked his head up to stare into the face of Hunker Holliday. The big owner-coach had on his hat and coat, a big cigar was cocked in his mouth.

Johnny gulped and blinked.

"I know," he heard himself mumble. "I sure helped a lot."

Holliday scowled and opened his mouth. He changed his mind and sat down on the bench, gave Johnny a shove on the shoulder that twisted him around to face him.

"No nerve?" Holliday snapped. "Is that it?"

Bates' head jerked back and his face got hot.

"What the hell are you saying?" he blurted out.

"What are you saying?" the big man countered sharply. "You have a tough one and there's nobody's shoulder to cry on. Nobody but you to feel sorry!"

Bates swallowed, tried to get words out.

"That pass I threw for their six points," he said with an effort finally. "And Jocko doing it all himself from then on in. Didn't that make me a bum?"

Holliday eyed him tightly and slowly a warm expression seemed to spread over his big face.

"There are some that'll say so, Bates," he spoke quietly. "There always are. Ever hear the mob when Ted Williams strikes out with runners on? I wouldn't have a guy on my team who never had a tough break, or made a mistake."

"No?" Bates breathed almost in awe.

"Certainly not!" Holliday snapped.

"I'd know the guy wasn't human, and he'd scare me out of the sleep I have to have. No, that was just one of those bad breaks for you, but I've handled a lot of you boys just up from college and

so I played it safe. I turned things over to Jocko while you got experience without having to carry the load of responsibility."

"I see," Johnny murmured with a frown.

"Not quite, you don't," Holliday corrected gently. "Had I let you keep the reins you might have tried to redeem yourself by being the big hero and then really lost it for us. Look, Bates, we won it. That's all that matters a damn. It's in the bag and done with. Next Sunday you'll be a that-much better player. You'll have had your tough break and survived it. You'll still have all your brains to run the team. See what I mean?"

A clout on the head couldn't have dazed Johnny more. He gaped at Holliday.

"Next Sunday? Me?"

"Who else?" the owner-coach snapped and then blinked. "Doesn't anybody tell you anything? Jackson's out for the rest of the season. That makes you it!"

"Jackson . . . out?" Bates gasped.

"Ruptured appendix," Holliday said, and sighed. "Been nursing a pain for a couple of weeks and didn't tell a soul. It went bingo on him today. I've just talked with the hospital—he's resting fine and will be okay. But no more football this year for him. So it's you, Bates, and I'll kill you with my bare hands if I catch you looking for any more shoulders to weep on!"

With a nod for emphasis Holliday got to his feet and stood there staring down, as Johnny's thoughts boarded a slow merry-go-round.

"Got a girl?" he suddenly snapped.

"Yes. Yes, sir!"

"Then go take her to a movie," Holliday ordered. "Or dinner and a show, or a drink or something. Get out of here and forget there are such things as footballs until tomorrow afternoon. That's why the others cleared out so fast. See you tomorrow."

"Yes, tomorrow," Johnny murmured, and sat there in a trance as the big man

went out the main door, slamming it shut after him.

AS SOON as he was dressed Johnny tried Jane's Greenwich Village number on the dressing-room phone, but there was no answer. Instead of wasting time trying again, he went out and took the subway downtown to his modest hotel room on the West Side in the middle Thirties. He called again from there but there was still no answer.

By eight o'clock he had tried fourteen times, with the same result. By then, too, his stomach was protesting vigorously, so he went out and had a quick sandwich and called once more from the restaurant. No answer.

Annoyed, and equally worried, he rode downtown in the subway and walked the two blocks to where Jane shared a small three-room apartment with another girl in the fashion-designing profession. He practically wore out the doorbell before he gave up and returned uptown to his hotel room.

On the way he bought the late newspapers, but there was just a headline and a few lines of type on the game. None of the details yet. He thumbed through the rest of the sheets, tried Jane's number a half dozen more times, and around eleven o'clock exhaustion from the game caught up with him and he fell asleep propped up on the bed.

He woke up at four-thirty, remembered everything in a flash and reached for the phone. He was just picking it up when he realized what time it was and came to his senses. Instead of calling, he undressed, switched off the light, and got in between the sheets. He fell asleep instantly.

The jangle of his phone woke him up the second time. The sun was shining brightly, and the roar of New York traffic was coming through his windows. He reached for the phone, noting out of one eye that the table clock said eleven-fifteen. It was Jane and her voice was more refreshing than a shower.

"Johnny? Can you meet me at Pinta's

for lunch in an hour? I want to talk with you."

"Sure, and do I want to talk to you, baby!" he cried. "I phoned you a hundred times last night! Look, I—"

"I went to the Ice Show with Mary," Jane cut him off. "I've got to rush now, Johnny. Pinta's in an hour?"

"I'll be there. But look, honey, I want to tell you—"

"At Pinta's, Johnny," she stopped him again. "I must hang up, now. 'Bye, darling."

That very last word chipped off some of the ice that had started to coat Johnny's heart. He hung up and headed for the shower. In thirty minutes flat he was bounding down the steps of a subway kiosk, and he was on a downtown train before it occurred to him he hadn't purchased the late morning papers.

He was a few minutes early, but Jane was already there. He hurried over to the small table and crowded his frame into the chair. Today she was even more radiantly beautiful, perhaps more so because of a sort of wistful warmth in her violet-blue eyes.

"Hello, darling," she greeted him. And then splashed on the cold water. "Your face looks awful! Does it hurt much?"

"Hi, honey," he said and reached for one of her hands. "Get this news quick. Me, Johnny Bates, I play regular for the Panthers from here on in! Jackson got himself a ruptured appendix yesterday."

"I read about it. About you, too!"

The quick switch in her face and in her voice left Johnny with his mouth hanging open.

"Read what, Jane?"

"You mean you haven't read what they said about you?" she asked in a quick breath. "Well, then don't. They think you are a bum. I even cried a little. Oh, Johnny!"

"Hey, wait a minute!" he gasped. "No, I haven't seen the papers, but I don't care what those guys wrote. So I had a tough one? Well, as Hunker told me,

he wouldn't—"

"Johnny!" she cried.

For a second he thought she was in terrible pain, and his tongue couldn't form words.

"Jane, baby!" he got out. "What's the matter?"

"You're not going to resign? You're going to continue, after what they think?"

IT WAS like a meat a between the eyes and he could only gape at her. To him it was the craziest question of the week! Quit the Panthers, now? He struggled for words and got them out.

"Jane, listen to me! You don't understand, honey. It's the best break I ever got. I'm the regular quarterback now. Cherry Jackson's job. And I'll do all right. That I know! I'll—"

He stumbled to a stop and stared at her. The world was suddenly more cock-eyed than a man could believe. Jane was looking at him like a whipped puppy and slowly shaking her head.

"And I thought I had such wonderful news to tell you," she murmured, and bit her lips.

"Huh?" was the best he could do.

"Mary has a brother with a big firm of architects in Chicago." Jane spoke as though reciting a lesson. "She got a letter from him only this morning, and he mentioned that he was working practically double time because the firm was so short-handed of good men. When she told me, I was so happy I couldn't wait to phone you to meet me. I'm sure they'd take you on, Johnny. And we'd both be in Chicago, don't you see? Johnny, you can't be serious about football after yesterday?"

He didn't say anything for a moment or two. He sat looking at her with his heart just an aching lump of misery. And then slowly he nodded his head.

"More than ever, Jane. You see, it's just a little bit more than my big chance. It's the Panthers, too."

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about," she said sharply. "And I

don't believe I care!"

She had tried to withdraw her hand from his, but he held it tight.

"Maybe it's something that only dopes like me can understand," he said quietly. "Loyalty to the team, or what have you. I don't know. Maybe Holliday has a crystal ball and he saw this thing coming. That I don't know either. I only know he signed me, and had me sit the bench, and mailed my check every two weeks. More dough than I ever earned in my life. I only know that not one of a swell bunch of guys gave me a rib for yesterday. Not even in the heat of the game right after it happened. Maybe that only means something to a dope. If so, then I'm a dope. I wish I could put it a better way, honey, but there it is. And I love you terribly!"

If the last registered on Jane not a trace showed in her face. She looked at him steadily for a moment, then took a breath and let it out in a sigh of quiet defeat.

"All right, Johnny," she said. "I was crazy to have even dreamed otherwise. Here's the other part of what I had to tell you. My job can't wait until the first. I'm flying out to Chicago next Sunday afternoon."

One meat was in the face was something, but two were a world come to an end with a resounding crash. In Johnny's state the very best he could do was come up with a single word.

"No!"

"Yes. Besides—well, the way things stand it might as well be tomorrow."

"Hold everything, honey," Johnny pleaded. "This is us, remember? Not a couple of other people. We'll be pulling knives in a minute. Let's slow down and go at it right."

"How can we?"

"How can't we?" he almost yelled, as real anger took a pass at him. "Look, I'm set now. I'm really earning my money, and we both know it's more than the two of us could make together the other way. Look, Jane, give my side of it this much of a break—make them wait

until the first. If I'm a flop next Sunday, okay. Maybe then I will quit and go with you. But I've got to know, Jane. Something inside of me says I have to. Pro football isn't just a thing for mugs, no more than pro baseball. It's big and getting bigger. So there are certain risks, but there's a risk in everything. A guy's got to be loyal to something he believes in, or where is he? Hanging in the air and no good to anybody. Now, let's calm down and order."

"I'm not hungry, now, Johnny." She rose to her feet. "Besides, I have a lot of work to do. I'm working in the apartment today, so as not to be bothered by anyone."

"I'll go with you," he said firmly. "This thing—"

"No, please. It would be useless, Johnny. You stay here and eat. And then you have to go to practice, don't you? You mustn't make Mr. Hunker Holliday impatient by your tardiness."

He ignored the remark and pushed up to his feet.

"But when will I see you?" he pleaded. She looked at him standing there, a great big hurt Saint Bernard with his heart hanging out in plain view. For an instant something flashed in her eyes and then it was gone.

"I don't know, Johnny. I'll be frighteningly busy. Why don't you phone me when you get the time? Bye, now."

He watched her walk away. A passing patron bumped into him, apologized, and never knew how close he came to getting his head knocked out into the street.

CHAPTER VI

Tough Bisons

THE words, "All right, that's it! Get out of your suits," from Hunker Holliday's lips booming across the sloppy surface of the Polo Grounds were gratefully welcomed by the various

groups of men clad in mud-soaked Panther football gear. To a man they pulled off their helmets and wiped the clammy, sticky stuff from their faces with their jersey sleeves.

It wasn't that the final Saturday afternoon practice session had been a slave-driving affair. It was the day—one of those late November cross-ups that could only be suffered and forgotten as quickly as possible.

As a matter of fact, when the squad had reported they had fully expected to sit around the dressing room in their underwear while Hunker took them through an intensive skull-practice session. But they had been wrong. Being a perfectionist in all things, the big owner-coach had ordered them into their suits and out onto the sticky, half-melted field for the real business. And they remained there for almost two hours.

Now, though, it was history and hot showers and dry clothes awaited them. His helmet swinging from his hand by the strap, his broad shoulders drooping and his head bent, Johnny Bates plodded across the muddy field with hardly a thought in his head. The way he felt, if the field turned over and buried him deep he wouldn't have minded a bit.

Tomorrow afternoon Jane would take off for Chicago. The three times since Monday he had been able to be with her alone, and even then for only short minutes at a time, he had used every argument at his command. But he might just as well have saved his breath and efforts. Jane was taking that new job in Chicago, and if he wanted to see her again he could come to the Windy City when his silly football season was over. That was that, and there was no changing it, unless he got some sense in his head and made the change.

"What's the matter, chum? You got bumped in that last scrimmage?"

Johnny turned his head to stare into Joe Nason's questioning face.

"I'm okay," he grunted, and pushed in through the dressing-room door and

over to his locker.

The big tackle, who had been moved up to the regulars because of his work against the Eagles, frowned and followed him over.

"That dame, Johnny?" he asked flatly, dropping down on the bench. "That Jane Carter? These last couple of days you've been calling signals out of a fog, you know."

Bates shrugged and began peeling off his wet suit. When he was stripped he glanced at Nason as though suddenly remembering that the big tackle was still there.

"She takes off for Chicago tomorrow," he said tonelessly. "A laugh, isn't it? While I'm out there getting half drowned against the Bisons she'll be flying away from me cold. Women are the darnedest people, Joe."

Nason shrugged and grinned.

"I wouldn't know for sure," he grunted. "I've only been married a couple of times. First time when I was nineteen. So she's going, huh?"

"She's going. We've had it out and she won't change her mind. I'm supposed to change mine."

Nason peered at him out the corner of one eye.

"Let me guess," he murmured. "Pass up this rough and nasty business—that would be it?"

"That would be it," Johnny said, and snapped his shower towel at the locker door to relieve the tension in him. "Some of the newspaper boys wrote that I am a bum, and that's all she'll believe. What's a guy to do?"

Joe Nason didn't get the chance to reply to that one. At that moment Hunker Holliday strode by, came to a stop and stared at Bates.

"Stop horsing around and get your shower," he growled. "The joint's not steam-heated that much."

Johnny blinked, and for an unguarded second the smoldering anger in him flared up and off his tongue.

"Relax!" he bit off. "I won't drop dead!"

"What?" Holliday gasped.

"Forget it," Johnny grunted and walked over to the shower room.

Holliday took a breath, swallowed, and swiveled his eyes to Nason.

"What's biting that kid?" he growled. "All week he's acted like it should be the Rose Bowl."

"A four-letter word," Nason told him. "Dame."

"His girl?" Holliday said.

"Yeah," Nason nodded. "I met her once, and I can see his point. A very classy number. A real doll. Only fault is she rates us as bums and wants Johnny should agree. But the boy don't and so she's flying to Chicago tomorrow, so he says. The poor lad's in a haze."

Hunker Holliday's eyes tightened and his lips became stiff ridges across the lower half of his face.

"Tell me more," he said, and then shook his head. "No. When you get into your clothes, Joe, stop by my office."

"Will do, Boss," Nason sighed, and got up off the bench.

JUST as though to show they had just been kidding, the weather gods came up with a perfect football day on Sunday. Not a cloud in the sky, hardly more than a breath of wind, and the field dried up and hard enough without being rock-hard. Shortly before game time close to fifty thousand fans were in their seats, and from the looks of things you would have thought that this one was to be for the national title.

It wasn't, though, but in a certain sense it was pretty close to it. The previous night, under the lights in Baltimore, the Eagles had taken an upset trimming from the lowly Hawks. That put the Eagles two games in the lost column behind the league-leading Panthers. Win this one against the Bisons and Holliday's boys were practically in.

True, they had a couple more to play besides this one, but they were contests against teams that had rested in the cellar division all season long and were more ragged and slipshod in their play

than at the very start of the season.

So this was the big one, but it would be no walkover. After a bad start the Bisons had caught fire and were knocking over much higher-rated teams left and right. They had taken the last four straight, and were getting better. Not as big as the Eagles, yet every man on the squad could still knock you down and make you stay down. Added to that, they were a fast, tricky team that could carry the ball into your end zone by way of Albany, if you didn't watch out.

So, for that reason, and others, many thousands were there to watch the Panthers flatten the upstarts and halt them cold. And a few other thousand were there to see the Bisons once more kick old man percentage in the pants.

In the Panthers' dressing room Hunker Holliday was giving his last-minute talk to his squad, and pulling no punches.

"They got a team even better than the Eagles, in my book," he said, and pulled something from his pocket. "See this? A good old dollar bill. Win today and each of you will get around two thousand of these lovely-looking things, because a win today is certain to put us in the big one at Chicago."

With a nod for emphasis, the owner-coach stuck the bill back in his pocket and cleared his throat.

"That's about all I've got to say," he continued. "All week we've been working on their plays, and if you don't know them now, it's too late. Last week you had Pauling. This time you've got two lads just as good, if maybe not better. Holtz at left tackle and Spencer at right half. Watch them, and I don't mean every now and then, but for every one of the minutes the clock moves. Okay, get out there and give me a football game, one with you lads on top. Get going!"

Holliday clapped his hands like a signal, stuck the dead cigar back in his mouth and started for his office. On second thought, he stopped and touched Bates on the ~~ass~~ as the first-string quar-

terback was about to go out with the others. Johnny glanced at him and waited, while Holliday frowned a little.

"Most of that advice was for you, Johnny," the big man said. "I'm riding with you all the way, so don't forget it. But skip me. It's the boys—lots of them have got troubles, too. This can be your day, see?"

"Sure," Johnny grunted absently. "Don't worry, I'll give you a football game."

"You give me better than just a football game!" Holliday snapped, and went on into his office.

Presently things were all set. With his usual streak of luck, Jocko Lane had won the toss and the Panthers were kicking off. Waiting while Lane got the ball set to his liking, Johnny Bates tried to keep his mind a blank save for the details of the job coming up.

It was hopeless. Even at that moment a big air transport went thundering across the sky, bound west. For Chicago with Jane aboard? Could be. Her take-off time was two o'clock. Maybe she was even looking down at the Polo Grounds, and thinking—what?

WITH the kick-off, Johnny slammed that little door shut in his head and moved forward with the others. It was a good kick, clear down to the Bison one where Spencer gathered it into his arms and started running. Right then and there came proof of Holliday's words of caution. With no time at all for much interference to form for him, the Bisons' speedy halfback side-stepped two Panthers diving at him, reversed his field to avoid two more and went up the side stripe past his own forty-five like a jet-propelled rabbit.

At the midfield stripe Johnny Bates had a chance, but it was no good. That twisting, squirming body was not there to be gathered into his arms. Johnny slid on his face and watched Jocko Lane try to ram the man off side at the Panther forty-one, but he too simply plowed a hole in the air and hit the ground.

That put Spencer in the clear and he went over into the end zone, and the stands went crazy. A couple of minutes later the point try was good, and the Bisons were off and running with seven big points.

"Okay, they got their one, and that's all!" Lane bellowed as they took up positions to receive. "Now we take over!"

It was close to a good prophecy by the Panther captain. He took the kick on his eleven, and when finally the Bisons dragged him to earth to stay the pig-skin was on their own thirty-seven.

In the huddle Johnny Bates experienced a moment of fear, and then shrugged it off. He called for a quick pass play to Stacey at end and it clicked for nine yards. Had not Stacey been forced to duck back a yard to grab the ball he might have gone all the way.

"Okay, I'm rid of the kinks," Johnny said in the huddle. "They get it right back, for a surprise."

It didn't work and it was a guy named Holtz that killed it. The Bison tackle dumped Nason, his opposing number, to one side and crashed through to spill Bates before Johnny could get the ball away. The six-yard loss made it third and seven.

In the huddle, Johnny called for a slam through the weak side, after an into-the-flat-pass fake, with Lane finally taking the ball. The Panther captain went through the hole opened up like a runaway locomotive, and the Bison secondary, sucked momentarily out of position by the tricky fake, couldn't get back in time. Lane went all the way, and he also kicked the extra point to tie up the ball game.

And that was that for both teams. The first quarter passed with neither side getting even close to pay dirt again. Each was well schooled in the other's plays, and after the two quick touchdowns it became a dog-eat-dog affair. Passes that clicked went for only a few yards. The magic touch seemed to have disappeared, particularly so with the Panthers.

There was that extra something missing—the spark, or what have you. Johnny used good judgment in picking out the plays to be run, but several times he was just a step too late in the execution of his own individual part. Twice he fumbled, but big Joe Nason was right there each time to fall on the bobbling ball. Nobody said anything in the huddle because there wasn't much you could say. And besides, the Bisons weren't shooting off any rockets, either.

So it went for the first quarter, and for a good portion of the second period. Then, with three minutes to go, the Panthers took a punt on their thirty-two. Johnny caught it, and he bulled and slashed to the forty-eight before Spencer and Holtz hit him from opposite sides and he went down like a felled telephone pole.

"Now, take Jackson," Holtz grunted in his ear, as the three of them lay in a tangle. "We never would have caught Cherry. You're in the wrong business, chum."

Those needling words by the stocky Bison tackle were hot knives across Johnny Bates' brain. A vision of Jane telling him just about the same thing, of being in the wrong business, floated through his head and he saw red for a crazy moment. He shoved Holtz off him and got to his feet, trembling.

"Be meeting you!" was all he could get out.

CHAPTER VII

Shot in the Arm

IN THE huddle, Johnny called for the razzle-dazzle play—the same one that had taken Jackson out of the lineup. The same play that had handed the Eagles a touchdown last Sunday. With but two minutes to go in the half, and considering how things stood, the play was fully worth the risks attached.

It clicked. It clicked fine, save for the fact that the raging anger in Johnny Bates gave him more strength than usual. By the time he was over in the flat and taking the quick lateral from Lane, Stacey was all alone in the Bison end zone cooling his heels. Johnny had all the time in the world, but it was a four-alarm fire of frustration in his head. His pass went five feet over Stacey's straining fingers, to hit the ground and roll incomplete.

As the ball was brought back, Jocko Lane stared bug-eyed at Johnny.

"You trying to give somebody in the seats a souvenir?" he growled.

Johnny glared at him.

"What's Stacey wearing for shoes?" he snapped back. "Lumps of lead? My sister could have caught it!"

Jocko Lane opened his mouth and then slowly closed it. He stared at Bates a moment longer, then shook his head, walked over to the huddle. Johnny called for a quarterback sneak and got flattened for a two-yard loss. He gave the ball to Lane next, and blocked out Spencer coming through so hard the man bounced. As it was, Johnny had to get up slowly himself. He felt like he'd left half his brains on the ground, but those mental fires were still blazing too much for him to care.

Lane just barely made it first down.

"Easy, chum," someone said. "We got a second half yet. Nobody throws passes with a broken arm."

It was Joe Nason who spoke, and Johnny looked at him through a red haze.

"What's the matter?" he snarled. "Don't I get paid to play football?"

Nason compressed his lips a moment and then shook his head.

"Not that kind of football, Johnny," he said. "It doesn't get you anything but lumps. Points we want, instead."

Bates walked away. In the huddle he called for another tricky pass play. It didn't work. He hurried the pass too much and the potential receiver could only caress it with the tips of his fingers.

The Panthers tried one more play through the line that did get them a first down on the twenty-two. But there the half ended.

In the dressing room Bates listened to Holliday's words with but a partial mind, his thoughts mainly on Jane Carson. She was probably halfway to Chicago now, and here he was getting cleats tramped into his face because he was thick enough to believe in something. Was it all worth it? He wasn't so sure now, and he was too tired to work it out all the way.

"Now, get out there and get some points," Holliday was saying. "The horsing around is over. Bates!"

Johnny lifted his throbbing head and saw the squad trooping out and Holliday walking toward him. He got to his feet and put his helmet on.

"For you I got something special!" the owner-coach snapped. "Come with me."

As Johnny nodded, wondering, Holliday took him firmly by the arm and escorted him out the dressing-room door and down the clubhouse steps. As they walked silently across the sod to the Panther bench, Bates' curiosity got the better of him.

"Okay, what is it?" he blurted out. "I was terrible, so you're having me arrested?"

Holliday snorted softly and made a face.

"You were terrible, all right," he grunted. "You all were. No, you're being my special guest for the start of this second half."

Bates' heart plopped down and he fought for his tongue. They had reached the bench and Holliday released the grip on his arm.

"A few things you've been overlooking," the big owner-coach of the Panthers grunted. "I'll point some of them out to you. Sit down and wait for me. Got a few words for Lane."

THE partial shove on his chest helped Johnny seat himself on the bench. Absently he pulled a blanket about his shoulders as he watched Holliday go

over to the group starting the second half and talk to them quietly.

Included in the group was Hanson, who had doubled at the quarterback spot several times in practice. Johnny's heart chilled and began to slide downhill. Well, there it was, but Holliday was doing it in a mighty funny way. Why not just tell him to stay in the dressing room and keep his feet warm? Why all this hocus-pocus?

He groaned through his clenched teeth, took his eyes off Holliday and the boys and stared but half seeing, up at the packed stands. At that moment another big plane roared overhead, west-bound, and the jingle-jangle of his thoughts started on the crazy merry-go-round again. Then Holliday had dropped his huge bulk down beside him.

Out on the field the Bisons were fixing the ball on their forty to kick off the second half. It was a good kick and Lane took it clean on the ten and went to the seventeen. As they went into the huddle Holliday dug an elbow in Johnny's ribs.

"Watch that Spencer close!" he snapped. "This'll be a pass. Watch how he works outside. That's why he's getting through at you!"

Johnny saw how the classy Bison half-back skirted the folded end of the line and got a clean crack at the man with the ball. It was a pass play, but Hanson was dropped in his tracks.

"Hanson went too far out," Holliday said. "Just like you did. Remember it. Now, watch Holtz on this one."

For five full minutes that's the way it was. Holliday kept up a running fire of talk as the two squads locked heads and arms and legs and everything else out there on the field. Holliday pointed out a dozen little things that Johnny hadn't even noticed when he'd been in the game. The urge to get out and correct matters boiled up in him and he began to squirm on the bench.

"Okay, I was blind," he finally exploded. "But I've got my eyes open now. Let me go in!"

Holliday ignored him completely. He sat watching the Panthers make only four yards on three plays, and then as Lane called time he turned to Bates.

"Just one more thing for you to get a look at, Johnny," he said, and shoved a hand into the side pocket of his bear-sized polo coat. "Take these and have a look at Section Seventeen over there—the end seat of the third row back."

Bates blinked stupidly at the small pair of binoculars Holliday had thrust into his hands.

"What in the—" he began.

"Look!" Holliday boomed. "Section Seventeen, end seat of the third row back. Go on!"

Wondering if the strain of things had loosened a screw or two in Holliday's

last night. You've got a swell girl, Bates. Quick to see the sense of things when it's put to her right. Wonderful girl!"

"But you tell me that only now!" Johnny cried, as a conflict of emotions whipped through him. "All that first half I didn't—"

"Leave the coaching to me!" Holliday stopped him. "I know when it's the time for a man to get the shot in the arm. Now, get out there and play football!"

The whack on the back made Johnny gulp for breath. Then he was clamping on his helmet and running onto the field. Hanson saw him coming and passed him halfway, his helmet off and dangling by the strap. "Get 'em, Johnny!" he said and ran on by to the bench.

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head, Johnny put the glasses to his eyes and focused them on the end seat of the third row back in Section Seventeen. For a crazy second it was an impossible mirage, and then he knew it to be real. There she sat, more lovely and gorgeous than a hand-picked angel!

"It's Jane!" he gasped and almost dropped the glasses.

"I know," Holliday grunted in his ear. "And the lady next to her is Mrs. Holliday. Once she didn't go much for pro football either."

Johnny turned and his mouth worked like that of a fish out of water.

"But—but Jane was flying to Chicago!" he choked. "The two o'clock from La Guardia. She—"

"She's sitting up there, isn't she?" Holliday snapped. "So she didn't take the plane."

"But why?" Johnny blurted. "I don't get it."

"You think working defense and offense stuff is all a coach does?" Holliday boomed at him. "Hell, that's just a part of it! Mrs. Holliday and I went calling

Time was called in, and in the huddle Lane looked at Johnny.

"Anything special?" he asked.

"Very," Johnny said. "Hunker wants four touchdowns beginning with now. Sixty-two, and clear the track, boys!"

Sixty-two was the razzle-dazzle pass play off the Statue-of-Liberty setup. The Bisons seemed to sense it but it didn't do them any good. Johnny didn't go so far out into the flat this time, and Spencer breaking through had no time to get in close.

The pass was a brown bullet that seemed to have no trajectory at all. Johnny let it go from the Bison forty-six and Stacey caught it in the end zone without having to move a step to either side. Big Joe Nason untangled himself from the scramble and ran over and hugged Johnny.

"Now we're cooking!" the tackle cried. "I got a feeling. What's Hunker been doing—slipping you a few shots?"

"Just one in the arm," Johnny laughed. "Jane's here, Joe. She's up there in the stands. She didn't go to Chicago!"

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"No fooling?" Nason beamed. "She changed her mind?"

"Holliday and his wife changed it for her," Bates told him. "I'll find out later. Come on, you guys, let's play some football."

And play football, Johnny Bates and the Panthers did. Lane kicked the extra point to put them seven out in front, and then they really went to town. The Bisons fought back viciously and made a battle of it, but there was no stopping Johnny Bates. The touch of magic was on everything he did. He couldn't do a single thing wrong. He ran the team like a master pilot.

When the third quarter ended the Panthers were two touchdowns out in front. And in the fourth quarter they registered two more, plus a field goal from the thirty-six off Jocko Lane's big boot for good measure. The Bisons just weren't in the game that last half, and when the gun finally called a halt to it the Panthers had the ball first and goal on the Bison seven.

Banged up and plenty battered but the happiest guy in the world, Johnny Bates walked slowly toward the clubhouse steps as the cash customers poured down onto the field to take the short-cut to the subway station. Suddenly something sweet and lovely hit him and Jane Carter was kissing him hard.

"Oh, Johnny! Johnny, darling, you were wonderful!"

He stared at her, almost not daring to believe his vision, and then the words

came off his lips like flood waters over a broken dam.

"Jane, honey! Hunker told me, but not until that second half. But what happened? He said he and his wife called on you and—"

"The second half?" Jane cried. "Not until then?"

"The shot in the arm when I needed it," Johnny said.

"What?"

Johnny shook his head and kissed her. "Skip it, who cares?" he said. "But what did they say? It's a miracle!"

"A lot of things, darling," she said. "They were both so wonderful, and she's such a dear. At first I was mad, but I couldn't stay mad. They made everything so clear. I must have been crazy, Johnny. But I'm not any more. I'm not going to Chicago—not now, or ever! Except maybe with you for the title game. Oh Johnny, everything's so-so suddenly nice!"

He started to kiss her again when, at that moment, Hunker Holliday walked by. The owner-coach stopped short and his eyes twinkled.

"Get out of that suit!" he boomed. "This is pneumonia weather. Get!"

Hunker Holliday nodded for emphasis, and with a grin playing across his big mouth, he walked on. Johnny turned back to Jane and completed the job Holliday had interrupted.

"Yes, everything's so suddenly nice," he said when it was finished. "Especially you, baby!"

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Bud Gresham ■ through
with a short, flat pass
■ center

My Future Just Passed

By RICHARD BRISTER

Eddie Alric thought he was through as a player, but he learned that fate has a way of evening up the count for those who never say die!

JAKE POLLARD flipped the ball back from his center spot in the A team's wall, and Eddie Alric set himself, in there at fullback. His long brown fingers trembled a little as he lifted them to take the snapback.

Eddie was always a bundle of nerves during the opening plays of the season's first scrimmage session, but it surprised him that this year, his final year of collegiate football, he was more keyed up than ever.

"Bud Gresham," he thought, ■ the ball slapped heavily into his eager mitts. "The guy meant to get under my skin, and I guess he succeeded."

As they'd taken the field for this inaugural scrimmage, Bud had grinned humorlessly at Eddie, and announced, "I'm gonna cut the props out from under you this year, pal. It's the last year for both of us, and I've had my fill of riding the bench."

Eddie had looked at the guy, wonder-

ing what it was that had turned Bud Gresham sour. Probably the only rough deal life ever dished up to Bud Gresham was the fact that he'd entered Emerson with the same class ■ Eddie Alric, and had discovered that his very considerable skill at kicking, throwing and toting a football was to win him, not fame, but the ignominious role of understudy to Eddie.

Eddie said, shrugging, "It's ■ free country, Bud. You're entitled to try. But I'll give you fair warning. I mean to stay in there at fullback."

"This year things are different," Bud said, with a quiet conviction that made Eddie stare at him.

"Different in what way?" he asked the big second-string fullback.

BUD grinned like the cat with the canary inside. "I spent the summer lifeguarding down on the beach, pal. There were a half dozen of us footballers down there. We got ourselves in perfect condition. Calisthenics, touch football and so on. Also," Bud added pointedly, "I spent an hour ■ day whipping the arm in shape, pitching those bullets."

"Smart," Eddie admitted, and a thin edge of tension built up within him ■ he mentally rehearsed his own unathletic summer vacation. A product of Scranton, Pa., whose coal-miner father was unable to help him with his college expenses, Eddie had spent the summer shuttling back and forth between New York and Bermuda, playing piano in ■ pickup dance band composed of fellow collegians.

As ■ piano player, Eddie was ■ great forward passing fullback. His piano lessons had been interrupted often, back home in Scranton, as the family finances seesawed, but he made up with enthusiasm what he lacked in solid musical groundwork. The crowd on the Bermuda boat found they at least could dance to Eddie's rhythmic thumping, and the pay had been good.

Eddie had needed the dough to see

him through this final year's financial tangle, but he had often vainly wished he could find a way of earning summer money that would keep him in shape for the football season.

And he'd reported late, too, coming in six days after the rest of the gang, to start this final season. He'd been soft ■ butter when he arrived, having missed out on most of the very important preliminary conditioning exercises, and he still wasn't ready for scrimmage, not really. But he'd had to stay with the boat till September 15. He'd promised to do so in order to land the job in the first place.

Coach Al "Tug" Menafee had been darned decent about it. "Guess I got no kicks coming, Eddie," the big fellow had said. "You've always done a job for me, the best you knew how to. And I know how it is, when a guy's hard up for money. Sorry I couldn't wangle you a better scholarship deal. That pitching arm of yours has been worth ■ fortune to this school. But try to make the Board cough up more than an eating job and ■ free room here. It just can't be done, kid."

So there it was, and now, taking the snapback from Jake Pollard in this, the season's first scrimmage, he knew he wasn't quite ready, and he knew that Bud Gresham, over there in the ■ back-field, was gunning for him, had been preparing for this moment all summer.

The scrubs came darting in, and he took the straight-arm out of storage, dropped one guy, faded away out of reach of another. Slim Dawes, the tall, stick-legged right wingman whose high-jumping prowess had earned him the nickname "Kangaroo," was breaking into an opening out there by the sideline.

Eddie leaned into his pitch, let the ball ride and tacked ■ small prayer onto it. His arm was creaky, he realized, watching the leather start to wobble a bit as the wind began to toy with it. It lost steam toward the end of its arc, dropped too soon.

And then it was Bud Gresham, darting

in swiftly from Slim Dawes' left, leaping high between the Kangaroo and the ball, snaring the pitch, and taking off like a gazelle through the startled A squad's scattered defenses.

Bud Gresham hadn't been kidding about practising up for football all summer. He was weeks ahead of any other man on the field in his timing and physical condition. He came back past the line of scrimmage in a brilliant spurt, did a pretty fadeaway as right halfback Olly Wilson dived at him.

The guy was rolling. He twisted away from Buttons Lemoine, the varsity signal caller, and now only Eddie remained between Bud and a free ride to the A squad's end zone.

"Well, he served notice on me," Eddie thought. "He's sick of that bench, and he means to shove me right off this ball club. The showdown's come sooner than I expected."

He took off hurriedly, hoping to run the big fellow over the sideline. But Gresham was making him look like a turtle, he saw, and he tried to kick it up another notch. He was carrying a good seven pounds of excess weight, however, and he suddenly realized that Bud Gresham was going to outrun him in the race to the sideline, go for a touchdown on the first scrimmage play of the season.

EDDIE didn't hesitate any longer. He took off in a long, flat dive, reaching out desperately, hoping to get a grip on one of Bud's flying legs, or at least grab a foot, trip him and slow him down so one of the others could get down here and nab him.

He hit the ground, sliding like a baseballer stealing home, and he bounced. He reached up, tried to grab Bud by the ankle, but the big fellow twisted his foot in full stride, and all Eddie got was a precarious grip on the front of Bud's flying right foot.

Bud's cleats came down and Eddie's fingers were driven mercilessly against the hard turf. He let out a muffled groan,

instinctively let go and sat up, nursing a set of fingers that seemed to have caught fire. Ruefully, he watched Bud Gresham romp down the field for a touchdown.

Tug Menafee lumbered over, seeming to shake the earth under his mountainous bulk, and helped Eddie to his feet.

"How's that hand?" the coach snapped anxiously.

It was blue. The knuckles and the joints of two fingers, the middle and the index, were beginning to swell. The pain throbbed steadily up along the back of Eddie's wrist.

He said sheepishly, "I shouldn't've grabbed him from underneath that way, I guess, coach."

Tug Menafee groaned. The big fellow had been banking heavily on Eddie's passing arm this season, and Eddie felt a thrust of sympathy for him. Tug went inside with him and waited anxiously while McDevitt, the trainer, gave Eddie's hand a thorough going over.

"Bad news," McDevitt announced heavily, when he'd finished his probing. "Those two fingers are mashed pretty bad, but that's not the worst of it. The tendons have been stretched, Tug. I'm afraid those two fingers won't be very strong, not this season."

"But good grief, Mac!" Tug said. "He needs those two fingers. Those two fingers and the thumb are the ones he uses most, for his passing. Are you telling me the kid's not going to be any good for passing this season?"

"That's it, Tug," the trainer said simply, and Eddie sat there unbelieving, swallowing the lump which suddenly had appeared in his throat.

"Gosh, Mac," he said, "are you dead certain about this? I—I've just got to show with some of those passes this season. That scout for the Bisons promised to come up and have a look-see at me, toward the end of the season. And—well, I've been counting hard on at least a couple of years up in the pro game, after graduation."

Tug Menafee put his big hand on Ed-

die's shoulder, said, "Steady, boy," and looked at the wizened, sandy-haired team trainer. "Eddie's got a kid brother back home in Scranton, Mac. His kid brother's smart as a whip and he wants to be a doctor. Eddie was kind of hoping to finance him through med school."

"I wish I could change the verdict," said McDevitt. "But those fingers are going to be dead the rest of this season, unless I'm badly mistaken." He looked unhappily at Eddie's stricken face. "Sorry, son," he said softly.

Eddie gulped. There'd never been a professional man in the Alric family. The kid brother, Johnny, was the first of the tribe who'd shown any genuine fondness for study, and Eddie could remember Mom's wistful smile, the quick flash of pride in her eyes, when Eddie'd promised to see to it that Johnny's dream of becoming a doctor came true.

He could have managed, with a year or two up in pro football, and the Bison scout had been very encouraging, last year, after watching Eddie whip out some of those long, flat, bullet-like forward passes.

Eddie said suddenly, huskily, "I'm not giving up on it. I'm going to work on those fingers. It's a long way to the end of the season, when that scout will be up here for another look at me. I'm going to prove you wrong, if I can, Mac."

"Son," said the trainer, "nothing would make me happier than to see you do that. And I'll help any way I can, but—" He broke off and bit on his lip. "Well, we'll see."

When the team hit the showers at the end of the workout, Bud Gresham said, "I'm sorry, pal," and Eddie's smile was forgiving, until the big fellow continued, saying, "I told you I'd snag your job. But I didn't want to snag it this way."

Eddie looked at him for a long, brittle moment. "I'll be back in there at the old stand before this season is finished, Bud," he said grimly.

THEY opened against the Tech gang, with Eddie riding the bench, his in-

jured mitt still swathed in bandages. Bud Gresham did a very creditable job in there at fullback. His passes helped them snow under the Techmen, 19-0.

The *Emerson Herald*, in its account of the game, praised Bud Gresham's performance and expressed the fond hope that Emerson still might achieve an unbeaten season, something that hadn't been done since '34, despite the loss of Eddie Alric's invaluable passing wizardry.

They squeaked past Milford, 7-6, and watching this one, Eddie massaged his crippled fingers. The pain was gone now, but McDevitt had been right—the fingers were weak, still utterly useless to Eddie on the business end of a forward pass.

Three weeks later they had won their fifth in a row, and the campus was afire with football fever. But the narrow victories had cost the team dearly. Minor injuries were beginning to crop up, an indicative first sign of exhaustion, and Tug Menafee paid Eddie a visit in his dormitory room.

"I'm worried about Olly Wilson," the gigantic coach, who'd once played right guard with the Philadelphia Eagles, told Eddie, as he dropped his bulk into Eddie's somewhat shabby guest chair.

"Yeah, I know what you mean, coach. Olly's the kind who gives all he's got, every minute. He doesn't know how to relax, even between plays. He'll wear himself to a frazzle before the end of the season," Eddie said worriedly. "But what can you do, coach? The guy's built that way."

"That's why I'm here, Eddie. I know that right mitt of yours is still kind of brittle. I wouldn't want you to spoil your chances of coming back as my forward passer, toward the end of the season, as you've promised yourself to. But—well, there's one way you might help me."

Eddie stared at the coach. "Huh?" he said. "How, coach?"

"You throw a mean block, Eddie. I'd like to use you in there at Olly's right half spot, once in awhile, on the offense.

You could convert easily enough to that spot. And it would help a lot, taking the pressure off Olly. We need every bit of man-power we can muster, for these final games of the season."

Eddie sighed. Briefly, he considered begging out of the chore. He'd been exercising the injured fingers in every spare moment for weeks. He'd been thumping out boogie rhythms on the battered spinet over there in the corner of his room, and lately he had felt some of the old sensitiveness returning to the fingers.

But out there at practice, his passes had still failed to develop the necessary steam. What worried him about the coach's request was the thought that he might do so well, in there at blocking back, that Tug would want to continue to use him in that role right through to the end of the season.

But he was a football player, after all. He was needed. He said, "It's okay by me, coach. Olly sure needs a rest, and I guess I'm the logical fill-in."

The huge man looked gratefully, soberly at him. "I'm proud of you, son," he said. "Some guys wouldn't take this the way you're taking it."

When the coach had gone, Eddie looked at the closed door and said in a whisper, "Something tells me those alumni wolves are howling around that big guy's heels. He probably needs an unbeaten season to hold his job. But he was too big to put it up to me on that basis."

He would do his best for Tug out there, he decided.

They took on State's behemoths the following weekend. Eddie Alric, a little unsure of himself in there at right half from time to time on the offense, made up in enthusiasm what he lacked in familiarity with his new chores.

IN THE final quarter, with the game still scoreless, Buttons Lemoine gambled everything on a passing offense. They lined up at the midstripe, Jake Pollard spiraled the ball back to Bud

Gresham. The State linemen came charging in. Eddie shouldered one guy to the ground, hurled his body into the path of another, and got a brutal pummeling in the ribs for his troubles.

But he dropped his man neatly, scrambled back onto his feet, and watched Bud Gresham, still fading away from the onrush of State men, crank his right arm and pitch the apple.

Kangaroo Dawes was down on the enemy twenty. The big fellow was cutting fast, and for a tense half-second, Eddie held his breath, watching the stick-legged wingman with the flypaper fingers leap high for the ball.

Unfortunately, Gresham had a tendency to underrate the Kangaroo's leaping ability. He could have thrown the pill a good foot higher and the Kangaroo would have been able to snag it.

As it was, a State backfield man was able to get his fingertips on the leather and deflect it out of the tall wingman's grasp. The ball went up in a wobbly arc and then plopped on the brown turf, uncompleted.

Buttons Lemoine called time out, and in the friendliest way, Eddie took Bud Gresham aside and said, "Not trying to tell you how to do your job, Bud, but you can lift those pitches a little more and Kangaroo will still snag 'em. The guy's a champ high-jumper, don't forget, and there's—"

"I hadn't forgotten," Bud Gresham said. "We'll complete one. Let us worry about it."

"Sure," Eddie said, shrugging, and he turned away. Obviously Bud Gresham was a guy who had trouble entertaining any idea unless he personally gave birth to it.

They lined up again, after time out expired, and this time Bud went through with a short, flat pass over center, completed to Buttons. They were on the enemy thirty-eight, with only three minutes left, though, and the game still scoreless.

Bud grinned at Eddie in the huddle, as if to say, "You don't have to tell me

how to pitch passes, pal."

Eddie didn't look at him. This was no time for personality exchanges. This was the time to rack up another win toward Tug Menafee's first unbeaten season as Emerson coach.

They wasted one down, Buttons trying to get loose around the left side and going down for no gain. Bud Gresham went back to try another pass, and the enemy piled in eagerly at him.

Eddie got a big tackle with a body block, scrambled to his feet, and saw that Bud Gresham was in trouble. The fellow was fading, fading, unable to find a receiver. Eddie darted back, hoping to nail one of the State men who were charging at Bud Gresham.

At the last moment, caught in a pocket, Bud yelled, "Heads up!" at Eddie, and flipped the ball to one side and behind him.

Eddie had to scurry to get it before it could hit the turf and bounce crazily. He straightened, pivoted, and played hare and hounds with the State tacklers for a couple of seconds. He saw an opening, of sorts, and raced hard to get back at least to the line of scrimmage.

A State end hurled himself at Eddie from the right. Automatically, Eddie shifted the ball to his left hand, started a straight-arm lancing out at the fellow. But something he was powerless to control took the sting out of that straight-arm, an instinctive, reflexive reluctance to risk another injury to the right hand he had been nursing all season.

He hit the man on the headguard, but not hard enough. The guy kept coming, wrapped his arms around Eddie's knees and brought him hurtling down on the turf.

Eddie got up swearing under his breath. "I let Tug down on that play," he berated himself. "Didn't go all the way out on it."

In the huddle he pleaded with Buttons Lemoine for a chance to run with the apple, a chance to make up the ground he'd helped them to lose. But the quarterback shook his head, called for kick

formation, a field goal attempt with right guard Knobby Knox doing the kicking.

EDDIE blocked for the guy. He went down under three incharging State linemen, but then looked up with a happy grin on his face as the placement soared squarely between the uprights.

It was the ball game, things turned out. They'd squeaked through to win Tug another, but going off, Eddie was strangely subdued. He still felt vaguely conscience-stricken about pulling the string on that straight-arm. If the field goal hadn't panned out, he thought grimly, he would have had the loss of Tug's untied, unbeaten season on his conscience.

Tug Menafee conferred soberly with Eddie. "Two games to go," the coach said. "You've done a job for me, Eddie. It's up to you, if you want to go back in there at full next weekend and get the rust off those passes. You know better than I do whether you've got the strength back in those fingers."

Eddie flexed the fingers in question. He had a hunch the exercising had paid off. The piano playing, up in the room, had done wonders, but he found this a hard decision. Bud Gresham was playing a good game out there at fullback. The team was still rolling toward its unbeaten season. It seemed risky, on the surface of it, to fool around with a winning combination.

"Maybe for that last game, coach. Against Wilson. By then I ought to be ready to uncork some passes."

The coach looked long and searchingly at him. "Okay, kid," he said finally, and Eddie's eyes dropped under the big fellow's stare.

They won their next-to-the-last the following weekend. They won handily, 13-0. Bud Gresham scored both of their touchdowns. The guy was a hero. He loved it. Eddie had to grin, watching Bud strut off the field when the gun banged. Well, Bud had waited a long time for the limelight. He'd worked for it.

Eddie was called to the dormitory telephone Sunday evening. It was long distance. A man named Carle, the scout for the big league Bisons, was on the other end of the wire.

"You going to be in there at fullback, pitching some of those passes in the windup against Wilson?" he asked Eddie.

"Well," Eddie hesitated, "I—I'm not exactly—"

"Reason I'm asking," the scout said, "there's a boy over at Tech I really ought to take a gander at, Alric. Frankly, I liked what I saw of you last year, and I'd like another look at you, in there at fullback."

Eddie made a sudden decision. Tug had given him the go ahead, his fingers felt fine, and the kid brother, Johnny, was counting on him to see him safely through med school. Mom had her heart set on having a doctor for a son. Nothing Eddie did should prevent Mom from seeing that dream come true, he decided.

"I'll be pitching some passes in there against Wilson, Mr. Carle," he told the scout firmly.

Bud Gresham received the news that he was once again to be Eddie Alric's understudy with hard-mouthed surliness, at Monday's practice session. Eddie spent a solid hour pitching passes to Kangaroo Dawes. They still were not as zippy as he might have desired, but he told himself hopefully that by the end of the week he would have the old touch back.

Wilson brought a huge contingent of rooters up with them for this climax game of the season. The game got underway in a thin, cold drizzle that made ball handling a nerve-wracking business.

Buttons Lemoine glanced at the sky, said shrewdly, "That sun'll bust through any minute and dry up this drizzle. Until then, we better stick close to the ground. Be ready to pounce on that ball like cats, you guys. Anybody can fumble in this muck."

So Eddie played through a scoreless first quarter, during which time he es-

sayed only one pass, and that one slid out of his damp fingers without the necessary zip and went uncompleted.

He swore disgustedly, thinking of Mr. Carle watching him carefully up there in the stands, waiting to see him unveil his passing wizardry, which was to be, Eddie hoped, the key to his football future with the Bisons.

MIDWAY through the second quarter, it happened. Buttons tried to get loose on 12-B around right end. Olly Wilson, going all out as always, flung his chunky figure broadside at an incoming Wilson tackler, and received a jolting kick in the short ribs for his trouble.

The right halfback grimaced as Eddie helped him to his feet.

"How is it?" Eddie said.

Olly was gasping for breath. "I'll be all right. Give me a minute."

But McDevitt ran out, examined the right halfback and firmly led him off the field. Eddie debated a moment, then called after the trainer, "Tell coach I'll fill in at right half, Mac."

Buttons Lemoine looked sharply at Eddie. "But that scout's up there, Eddie. You'll lose your chance for the Bisons. The field's drying out now. I was just about to call on you for some passes."

"Breaks of the game," Eddie said dully.

Buttons gave him a crooked grin. "Maybe later, then, Eddie."

Bud Gresham came in, and they slugged it out for what remained of that second quarter. Going in for the recess, with the game still scoreless, Eddie almost bumped into a tall, slope-shouldered man wearing a rumpled fedora.

"Hope I haven't brought you up here on a wild goose chase, Mr. Carle," Eddie said sheepishly.

"I do, too, son," the scout said. "Going back in at full for the last half?"

"I don't know, sir," Eddie sighed. "It'll depend on Olly Wilson. If he's able to go back in, I'll be at fullback. Otherwise —well, the team's worked hard for this unbeaten season."

"I'll be up there," the scout said, nodding toward the tiers of seats stretching upward beyond the concrete parapet. He turned away.

Eddie went in and saw Olly Wilson sitting on a green locker bench. "How about you?" Eddie asked tensely.

"Mac taped the ribs," Olly said, grinning. "I'm okay for the last half."

Tug came over and said, "You're my fullback, Eddie, for this last half."

So he went out there, and the Wilsons kicked off, and Buttons Lemoine took it, but fumbled. The enemy had the ball for some minutes, then kicked. All this while, it was clouding up over the field, and as Emerson got possession the rain started again.

Eddie tried one off right tackle and got four, but returned to the huddle rubbing the back of his right hand.

Buttons called a time out, said anxiously, "What is it?"

"Stretched those fingers again," Eddie said. He looked at Olly. "You're kidding us, Olly," he accused. "I saw you on that play. Those ribs are giving you blazes. No kidding now—isn't that the size of it?"

Olly Wilson flushed. "Okay," he admitted. "You always did have X-ray eyes, Eddie."

Bud Gresham romped in. Eddie went back to right half, blocking for Gresham on pile-driver assaults at the enemy wall. They slogged through a muddy third quarter, neither team scoring. Eddie threw himself savagely into his blocking assignments, stayed right in there on the defense, forgetting about Mr. Carle in the stands.

THEY had five minutes to go, and the rain stopped, just like that—like a turned-off faucet. One of the refs stuck a towel down his waistband and wiped the ball carefully before every play.

Buttons said, "Let's start throwing 'em dizzy," and called number 18. Bud Gresham went back with the ball, fading. Eddie nailed a big tackle to the ground, watched Bud heave the pill down along

the right sideline.

The Kangaroo was down there. He made his expert leap into the air, almost had it. One of the enemy backs leaped at the same time, however, and knocked the ball away just before it reached the Kangaroo's sticky fingers.

Eddie itched to throw one himself, but shelved the notion as impractical now. He wondered if there was any way to get it through Gresham's mule head that he could afford to lead the Kangaroo more with those bullets. All season long he'd harped at Bud on the subject. So had the Kangaroo, but Gresham stubbornly threw to the Kangaroo as he would throw to any mortal. He couldn't realize the Kangaroo was not just any mortal, but had the equivalent of steel springs secreted within his stick legs.

In the huddle, Eddie Alric said, "Let me toss a short one, will you, Buttons? To the Kangaroo, over center. My hand's okay for that."

"What's the deal?" the quarterback asked quickly.

"I want to show Bud here something."

He went back into the slot, and Jake Pollard let him have a nice long spiral. He did his fade, watched the Kangaroo dart sharply into a melee of Wilson defenders. He pitched the apple right at the bunch, but what seemed impossibly high.

The Kangaroo timed it nicely. He did a jump worthy of a basketball center, nailed it in one sticky, loose-fingered hand, and was dropped cold for a gain of seven yards.

Eddie looked at Bud Gresham and said nothing.

Bud said harriedly, "Listen, you think I haven't been trying all season to shoot them at him higher? It's like an instinct, keeping 'em down. I been fighting against it, but I pull 'em down at the last minute. Afraid of throwing it away, shooting into an interception."

Eddie suddenly understood the guy better. "Why didn't you say so before? Look, time's running out. We got money

to make yet, for that unbeaten season. Try harder."

They deployed for a pass play on the Wilson forty-eight. Bud went back. Eddie got himself a couple of eager beavers, charging in to bust up this play. The Kangaroo was down there, way down there. Bud started to heave it, and Eddie could see the struggle going on in the man.

Just before Bud let it go, Eddie yelled, "Lift it!"

He startled Bud Gresham. But the effect was just what he'd wanted. Bud didn't pull this one down. It hit the Kangaroo's eager hands a good nine feet off terra firma. The enemy defenseman down there didn't have a chance to block it. The Kangaroo went down to their eleven before he was driven out of bounds.

Bud Gresham looked at Eddie in the huddle and said, "You were right. You scared me into it, but it clicked. You throw one, pal. I'll keep 'em off you."

Eddie stood there and thought it would be nice, pitching the winning touchdown, with Mr. Carle up there, watching. He looked at Buttons Lemoine. "You call it, Buttons."

Buttons Lemoine said, "We'll kick for it. It's the best chance now."

They built a stone wall around Knobby Knox. The iron-nerved right guard brought his huge foot against the pig-skin, sent the ball end-over-ending through the uprights. Once again they had squeaked through to win with a field goal. Tug Menafee had his unbeaten season.

"Sorry, kid," Carle said, intercepting Eddie on the way in. "You played a nice game of football, but as I said, our chief interest in you was as a passer. A man in my shoes can't afford to go out on a limb and—"

Tug Menafee came over, grabbed the scout and led him away, talking persuasively in Eddie's behalf. The last thing Eddie saw, as he went into the fieldhouse, was the scout's head wagging negatively against Tug Menafee's argu-

ments. Well, it had been a nice dream anyway, Eddie thought bitterly. But he didn't know how he was going to break the news to Mom and Johnny.

WILD whoops and laughter prevailed in the dressing room. Somebody wheeled the battered old upright out of a corner, dusted the keys with a sweatshirt, and yelled, "Come on, Eddie. Bang out a tune for us. We've got something to sing about now, if you'll make those chords for us."

Eddie sat down, grinning wryly, and gave them the chords that they wanted. He joined in the song somewhat reluctantly, wondering what he had to sing about, really. Tug Menafee came in with Mr. Carle and watched, smiling.

After the gang had sung off the first surge of high spirits, Mr. Carle spoke to Eddie. "There's nothing wrong with your fingers, Alric. I've been watching you, listening to you play that piano. You could have shown me some passes, during that last half. Why didn't you?"

Eddie flushed. "Gresham did all right at fullback. I was more use in there blocking for him."

Carle stared at him for a long moment. "Come up to Tug's office when you've showered and dressed, son. We'll sign a contract."

"But—you said—"

"I saw you play fullback and pitch perfect bull's-eyes last year, Alric. Today I know you do something that adds up a lot more important. I know you make a difficult choice between the team and your own personal welfare. You chose the team." He smiled. "Be waiting for you, up in Tug's office."

Eddie never took a shower so fast. Emerging from the stall, dripping, he was surprisingly mitted by a smiling Bud Gresham. "Glad things worked out so well for you, Eddie."

It was a good world, Eddie decided. He couldn't wait to sign that Bison contract. He couldn't wait to phone Scranton and pass on the good news to the home folks.

TOUCHDOWN CHORUS



Rosoff, kicking from his own seventeen, barely got the boot away

CHAPTER I

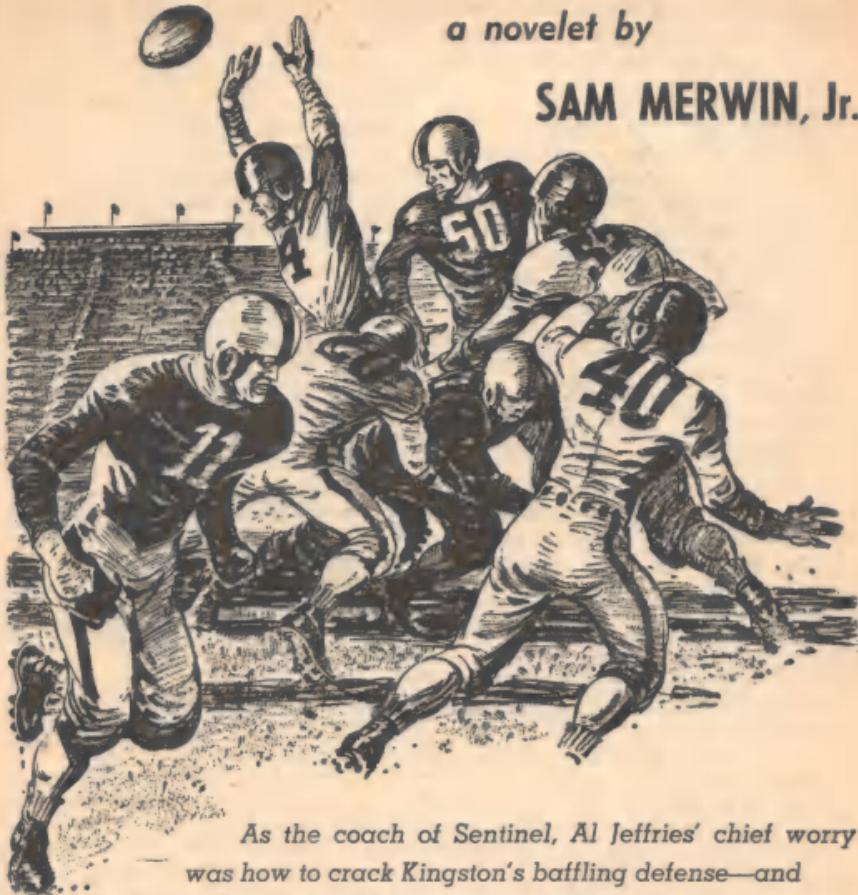
Deliberate Scramble

IN A WAY, Alan Jeffries thought, it was a pleasure to watch two well-coached teams perform without being responsible for either of them. As he watched the well-drilled black-and-gold phalanx of Army move into offensive formation on the barred turf far below Jeffries could enjoy the swift precision of their shift, the orderly swiftness of their deployment — the play got under way.

If Colonel Blaik's second-string offensive right guard was a half-step slow in pulling out to lead the interference—

as he had been repeatedly during this second half of the Kingston-Army game — it was no skin off Alan Jeffries' nose. He wouldn't have to answer for it later to red-necked and influential alumni. No, it was pleasant to sit here, charting plays and watching as an outsider.

Then all at once it ceased to be pleasure and turned to something very like terror. A burly lineman in the bright Blue and Yellow of Kingston suddenly appeared out of nowhere in the black-jerseyed West Point backfield. There was a sudden collision of bodies



a novelet by

SAM MERWIN, Jr.

*As the coach of Sentinel, Al Jeffries' chief worry
was how to crack Kingston's baffling defense—and
he suspected that his pretty wife knew the answer!*

and the ball carrier was lying flat on his back, five big yards behind where the play had started.

For the seventh time since the opening kickoff the supposedly unstoppable West Point attack had been halted and thrown back on the Army side of midfield. He frowned as he picked up his binoculars and caught the number of the Kingston lineman who had crashed

through. It was 86—Jorgenson, the left tackle.

He stared down at the chart on the writing board in front of him and tried to block in the defensive play. Jorgenson? It didn't make sense. The big tackle had been playing immovable object through the previous three quarters.

He lit a cigarette as Army called time out, thereby winning themselves an ex-

tra five-yard penalty. Army had taken a lot of time outs this afternoon. They had scored in the first two minutes on a long forward and double lateral, but had been unable to move since.

THAT the score was tied at seven apiece was more a matter of luck than indication of any weakness in the Kingston offense. Desperation tackles, a couple of damaging penalties and a fumble had been responsible for holding down the Kingston score. So far the Blue and Yellow looked even better than its newspaper rating.

And in exactly fourteen days—less the time this game had already consumed—Alan Jeffries' own Sentinel University team would be lining up against this same apparently invincible Kingston machine, on this very same Kingston field. That was the terror of it.

"How did you figure Jorgenson?" he asked without removing his cigarette, which was calmly taken from his lips and appropriated by the fur-bearing creature at his side.

"He crashed," said the voice that had come to mean more to him than any other. "He crashed and dumped the man on his pretty lastex pants. Thanks for the cigarette, honey."

"All right," said Al Jeffries, resignedly lighting himself a second cigarette, "so he crashed. But why Jorgenson? He's been playing ringpost for the defensive line all afternoon." He didn't want to look at Peggy just then. Sight of her alert, more-than-pretty young face would have got his mind off the game.

The trip up here to Kingston to scout the Blue and Yellow against Army was by way of being a desperation move. It was Al Jeffries' first season as head coach at Sentinel and if he didn't come up with some sort of a showing against Kingston in the final game the anvil chorus would have his ears ringing for life.

Naturally he had had Kingston scouted all season, and all season the re-

sults had been exactly nothing. The Blue and Yellow attack was not hard to figure—even if it was rugged to stop. They played out of a winged T with a series of punt formation variants. "Knocker" Craig's system was orthodox and sound and he had the men and boys to make it work smoothly.

But the Kingston defense had baffled the scouts, even as it had baffled the teams which had played the Blue and Yellow on six preceding Saturdays—to go down in a monotonous series of defeats. While defensive signals and variations were anything but new to Al Jeffries or anyone else, Knocker had come up with something that was almost as baffling as the defensive attack Fritz Crisler first developed at Princeton in the mid-Thirties and improved later at Michigan. It didn't seem to operate on any formula basis.

"It's good," Peggy told him, looking up from her own neatly marked play chart. "It's good, Al, but it's not magic." He risked a look at her then and found delight in the seriousness of her expression, in the adorable furrows on her usually smooth forehead.

"You understand it, I suppose," Alan said in a half derisive tone.

"Not yet," she replied gravely, "but there's something—"

The whistle interrupted her then as time was called in. The players trotted back into position and an Army back went deep for a punt. He barely got it away as a demoralized West Point line allowed a number of Blue and Yellow forwards to leak through.

Monte Bradford, the Kingston star, gathered the spiral in neatly on his eleven-yard line and ran it back to the twenty-two before a swarm of irate cadets managed to bring him down. Then the Kingston attack began to roll once more.

"We can contain them," Al muttered. "They'll score, but it won't be a push-over."

"It will be if Sentinel doesn't do some scoring of its own," said Peggy, like the

voice of doom beside him. He pretended not to hear and concentrated on the final moments of the game.

Kingston went all the way to the West Point seven in a series of swift-breaking plays and passes, only to be held by a stubborn Army line. The final gun sounded before they could get going on another drive.

Al paused in the act of gathering up his gear to listen to a list of football scores on other gridirons coming from a portable radio someone had brought to the pressbox. The Sentinel-Carstairs final came in after a string of junior college first-half scores. His team, under the guidance of Line Coach Nick Boldini, had managed to trim second-rank Carstairs by a 27-13 score.

But that was almost minor-league stuff compared to the game Al had just seen here in Kingston stadium. Kingston-Army was big-time, drawing 85,000 to the immense bowl. Sentinel, he understood from the advance ticket sale, had played to less than half of that on this same afternoon.

"Hey! Look who's here! Baby Lawrence!" shouted a weather-beaten syndicate writer, giving Peggy a hug. Immediately there were a lot of yells, and sportswriters gathered around her, laughing and asking her questions such as, "What's their secret, Baby?" and, "You going to booby trap this mob, kid?" and, "Where's that double-crosser who up and married you?"

"He's right here," said Peggy, reaching for him and drawing him into the huddle.

Al managed to keep smiling and nod pleasantly in response to the few perfunctory remarks cast his way—but it was not, he thought ruefully, the easiest thing to be a freshman head coach and married to the daughter of one of the grand old men of the game at one and the same time. He felt uncomfortable—out of things.

PEGGY'S father, Keene "Biff" Lawrence, was to a great extent foot-

ball at Sentinel. He had been the old ivy college's first All-American, shortly before World War One, and had come back from that conflict to become its first great coach. Only last year, after thirty full seasons at the helm, had he retired for good.

Peggy, of course, had been brought up in Sentinel football and the Biff Lawrence legend. Her mother had died in childbirth and the Old Man had brought her up himself. He hadn't done a bad job of it either, Al reflected, except for one thing—he had allowed her to learn entirely too much about football.

The press fraternity knew it and respected her talent even while they kidded her about it. She had been running the house for the Old Man ever since she had graduated at nineteen from a crack women's Eastern college, completing a rugged four-year course in three and emerging with a Phi Beta Kappa key and a summa cum laude to boot. Al, who had majored in physical education at a far larger and less difficult university in the Southwest, often felt like some sort of a cretin around her. More than once he had asked Peggy why on earth she had married an oversized dodo like him.

"Maybe because you can wiggle your ears," she told him. "Or maybe because you're the kind of a dodo who would ask a girl like me a question like that. Take it or leave it, that's how it is."

Al had taken it—and loved it. All through his apprenticeship as end and backfield coach under the Old Man, after his two seasons with the pros, he had loved it. Peggy, for him, was the perfect wife, the gal who didn't have to be told anything.

But in the trials of his first head coaching season he found himself a little perturbed by her too-evident popularity with the top football circles. He wasn't jealous, he told himself, but his being shoved into the background didn't do either his nerve or his nerves any good. And a football coach needs plenty of both.

But there was no questioning either her quick intelligence or her knowledge of the game around which she had been bred. She had, in fact as well as in popular rumor, been one of her father's chief aides in the seasons preceding his retirement. Her eyes were unerringly accurate and her brain could translate viewed action into football code and break it down into its component parts.

When at last they were alone in their compartment on the train bearing them back to Sentinel, Al looked at her as she combed and brushed vigorously her long-bobbed brown hair in front of the skimpy wall mirror.

He grinned and said, "Well, what about it?"

She knew what he meant without having to ask, which was another swell thing about being married to Peggy. She said, without a pause in the hair-brushing performance, "It's that defense that makes them so tough. It's built on a set of calculated risks that could ball up any attack just the way they did Army's today."

"And," said her husband, "the way they did Cornell and Michigan and North Carolina and Stanford and Navy and Dartmouth, too. It's a big curly bear and no mistake. How do you figure it?"

She glanced at him, then gave him a kiss. "Let's hear what you have on it, Al, honey," she told him.

"They've got some sort of rhythm in crashing those linemen, but I'm blessed if I understand it," he said, scowling. "They vary it against the different formations, at different parts of the field and on different downs. Like that big tackle, Jorgenson. He didn't get into the act until the last quarter, then—wham!"

"It's a scramble," said Peggy, putting down brush and comb and turning to face him. She looked about twelve years old. "It's a deliberate scramble. In the first half, on first and second downs, they crashed their left guard and right tackle —when the ball was in Army territory, of course.

"On third and fourth downs in the first half, with the ball in Army territory, they . . ." She went on almost without hesitation to unravel the entire complex defense system which had baffled so far the best scouting and other football brains in the country.

As he listened Al felt his resentment rise. He was ashamed of it but couldn't help it. Sure it was easy for her—it was all theory, wasn't it? She had never had to take those jarring tackles, to get her pert little nose rubbed in the dirt, to experience the hundred and one other pains of bruising bodily contact.

When she finished he said, "Okay, smarty, now I suppose you've figured out a system of beating that defense."

She eyed him, too astonished to be hurt at his tone. Then she said, "If I had, Al Jeffries, I think I'd be a fool to tell you."

CHAPTER II

Brainstorm

IT HADN'T developed into a row of course—Peggy had seen to that. But Al was still chewing it over in the back of his mind the following Wednesday, while he watched his assistants run the Sentinel Varsity against the white-shirted JayVees, who had been tutored in the attack used by Manton, the Southern college they were to play on the coming Saturday, the last game before the big wind-up with Kingston.

Manton was big and rugged and had depth, but according to her record and the Sentinel scouts' reports, the team was a step slow. Al and his brain trust —Nick Boldini, line coach, "Whelp" Whelton, backfield coach, and Pat Tierney, who handled the ends—figured the Sentinel Scarlet and Gray to triumph by two touchdowns with the second stringers doing most of the heavy work.

On the whole Al was proud of his

team. They had blown close decisions to Penn and Michigan, but they had not been outplayed. They were definitely not one of Old Man Biff Lawrence's famed juggernauts, but they were fast and cuts and could think on their feet under pressure. They were willing and they didn't fold.

He watched Ivy Rosoff, his first string quarterback, perform his incredible magic with the ball, pivoting, offering, faking, masking, withdrawing ■ the other varsity backs spun through their assignments. Rosoff, a junior, was the keystone of his T formation repertoire, Al thought.

But they were all of them important—Ivy, the hand-off master, and Red Young and Colly Palmer, the offensive halfbacks, along with Si Philips, his stocky, quick breaking fullback. The Old Man had certainly not left him holding the sack, either in first string backs or in his daughter. Still, there was trouble in the offing.

If, with this group of proven stars, along with Sentinel's five-year winning reputation, he didn't come up with ■ win over Kingston, there was going to be trouble. Sentinel alumni could forgive other losses even while they didn't like them. But two other losses and a trimming by Kingston meant plenty of grief.

And they weren't going to beat Kingston unless ■ miracle came rolling along. The Scarlet and Gray line was a spotty mixture of veterans and green sophomores, offensively. Mike Fennell, center and captain and one of the squad's few sixty-minute men, was ■ tower of strength and savvy. In Tip Fuller they had a great end, and sophomore Johnny Orcutt was fast rounding into shape on the other wing. The guards were hard working but not outstanding, and neither of the offensive tackles merited star rating.

Defensively, with Mike Fennell and big burly young Lew Murray backing up a tough rugged line, Al was fairly well satisfied. His secondaries didn't stop all the passes that came their way,

but they got their share—and they could all move fast and tackle hard. Teams that scored against Sentinel had to do it the hard way.

He saw Si Philips, his swift-breaking offensive fullback, cut down before he could make a yard by young Lew Murray, who had come rushing in on the play.

He turned to Whelp Whelton, his small, sandy-haired backfield assistant, and said, "Better get Murray out of the scrimmage, Whelp. He looks as if he could use ■ rest."

"Are you kidding?" Whelton, ■ chronically belligerent five-foot-five inquired. "He's barely been winded. Why, that kid can—"

"Can go on all day, I know," Al finished for the shorter man. "I'm thinking it might hurt his morale to play with the JayVees."

"Not that kid!" Whelton protested. "He'd rather play football than eat. He likes contact work. Why, he's been begging me—"

"To put him in there anywhere," said Al. "I don't care. Get him out of there before our offensive backfield's on crutches."

"Oh—got you, Al." Whelp's grin was winning. He trotted out on the field and made the required change, ordering Murray to take four fast laps around the field.

Watching the husky young defensive fullback trot easily along the sidelines, Al was again surprised at his angelic youthfulness of countenance. The kid looked like an angel, but he could hit and hurt like Satan himself in play. He was also, Al reflected, going to be something of ■ problem in the next two seasons.

When Si Philips finished with the Kingston game, he was done as ■ college player, being a senior. And young Murray was the only possible replacement in sight. Yet Murray, big, fast and rugged, was not ■ T-formation fullback.

He could run and block and kick and pass ■ well ■ he could tackle or back ■

EXCITING FOOTBALL MAGAZINE

line. For a sophomore he had amazing poise in the clutch, and the hotter the pressure the better he seemed to like it. Unfortunately his break was just a half-step too slow. He was fast enough once he got going—fast and shifty—but he didn't take off quickly enough in his first four strides.

DKAY, Al thought, so he could switch from the T to something else next year. But that meant wasting a season of Ivy Rosoff's amazing sleight of hand — a T ball-handler. He couldn't expect a group of kids like these to master a pair of intricate systems—the type of complex plays demanded by winning modern football—in one season. But he couldn't let Murray's offensive talent rot, either.

He thought once more of that bewildering Kingston defense and then, again, of the scene with Peggy in the train coming back from the Kingston-Army game. He wondered if she did have some answer to the riddle that faced him locked in her pretty and almost too-smart head. And he knew he wasn't going to ask her.

He felt like a traitor to the kids out there, but once in a while a man had to stand up and handle things for himself. If she could figure it, he told himself, so could he. Heck, he had to. If he couldn't he didn't rate either his job or his wife.

Practise ended and Al strolled back to the fieldhouse with Whelp and Nick Boldini and Mike Fennell and Ivy Rosoff. They were without exception in good spirits. They were confident, but not too confident. The team had been through the mill, had lost two games, but had not been beaten mentally. They were laughing and aglow with health.

"Wait until those Manton men get a load of Lew Murray's tackling," Ivy Rosoff chortled, rubbing sweat from his brow with the sleeve of his practise jersey. "Coach, when he hit Si out there I swear he got up in two pieces. If you hadn't called him off I'd have called for

the Marines, or anyway a couple good anti-tank guns."

"Yeah, and those Kingston Johnnies are going to get the same treatment," said Nick Boldini, a smile on his swarthy face.

"Let's take one game at a time," Al told them. "These Manton boys are no pushovers and they'll be loaded Saturday. Ivy, I want you to keep your eyes on Muldoon, that big defensive tackle of theirs. He can be trapped if you keep baiting him."

"Good old coach," said Ivy, with a display of white teeth. "He has all the answers for us before we get to the questions."

"Good old coach!" Al thought. He wished he had the answer to the problem that worried him most—how Sentinel was going to make any headway against that colossal Kingston defense. He let the rest of them pick up the patter until they reached the fieldhouse and went their various ways to change and ready themselves for supper.

He sat alone in his office for awhile, letting the twilight deepen around him without turning on a light. The ring of the telephone at his elbow jolted him out of his skull-beating. It was Peggy and she wanted to know if he was dining at home.

"Yeah, I guess so," he said. He didn't feel up to facing the horseplay of the training table just then.

"What's biting you?" Peggy wanted to know. She sounded almost — though she were laughing. Al vainly sought something to be happy about.

"Just thinking about Sentinel," he told her frankly.

"Well, it's a good thing you're coming home," she told him. "We've got alumni trouble that only you can solve."

"Tell them I left town," he all but shouted into the phone. "Tell them I just came down with amnesia and am locked up."

"It's a him, not a them," said his wife. "He's really a sweet old gentleman. You'd better come along on the double."

"Who ever heard of a sweet alumnus?" he moaned. But for all that, he hung up and went out to where his roadster was parked.

Thanks to Peggy's wit and charm it wasn't too bad. The alumnus turned out to be a gray-haired oldster who had been a teammate of the Old Man before World War One. He was some sort of big manufacturer out West and was going to be in the vicinity for a couple of weeks.

"Combining business with pleasure, kids," he told them, beaming. "I won't be able to see the Manton game but I'll be here to see your boys beat Kingston a week from Saturday. Haven't missed one of those games since nineteen twenty-six. No sirree."

AL FROWNED. "Here's hoping we can make it," he said gloomily.

"Al's got a new nickname—Gil Dobie, Junior," said Peggy. "He lives alone with his ulcers before every big game."

Their visitor laughed. Then, growing more serious, he said, "Come to think of it, I hope you've got the answer to that trick defense Knocker Craig has come up with. I caught their games against Stanford and Michigan—it's really hot stuff."

"Maybe you have the answer," said Al, hoping he had managed to conceal the sarcasm in his tone.

But, blithely unaware of the dangerous ground he trod, Teddy Peters, for that was the older man's name, pulled some sheets of copy paper from his pocket and proceeded to lay them on the table. Al winced as he saw scrawled on them the circles and crosses that represented the traditional map-symbols of football players.

"Now I don't pretend to know just how Knocker has his boys doing it," Teddy Peters said earnestly, "but I do know you can't stop those boys of his from crashing your plays. If they could be stopped Stanford or Michigan or Cornell or Army would have done it."

"The same thought has occurred to

me," said Al. Then he risked a glance at Peggy, across the table, caught the amused curve of her lips, the sparkle in her blue eyes, and decided to go along with it. Heck, he had more than his share of laughs coming to him.

"I've invented a new sort of formation," Peters said. "If you can't stop 'em, surround 'em. Hannibal used the same tactics at Cannae. Now if you spread your ends and halfbacks wide you're going to put their flanks out of whack with the rest of the setup."

"I see," said Al, managing somehow to keep a straight face. "But what's to stop them from simply knocking down the ball carrier?"

"Because if they do, he won't have the ball," said Teddy Peters, using his pencil to illustrate his point. "He can pass to either end or halfback, or he can lateral to his own quarterback."

"You're putting the fullback in the slot?" said Al.

"That's right," Peters told him. "You've got to have a real fullback for this system—someone who can run and pass and block."

He went on and it all sounded very logical—on paper. But of course it was full of bugs. Mr. Peters, his system having been explained and his charts generously donated to the Sentinel cause, left mercifully early. Al and Peggy locked up and went upstairs to bed.

"Thanks for being kind to him, Al," said Peggy. "Dad used to think a lot of him. He really is a nice old chap, even if that wacky system of his wouldn't fool a high school team."

"He was a good Joe," said Al, scratching his chest before buttoning his pajama top. "I needed a laugh and I got one. Imagine what those Kingston murderers would do to that spread!"

Later, lying awake and already playing the final game that lay ten days in the future, Al found himself figuring out just what would happen. He tried to visualize how the Blue and Yellow defense would operate against Teddy Peters' jerry-built formation. It was

absurd, of course. For one thing, he didn't have a fullback who could do all the things that had helped to make Jim Thorpe an all-time great.

Or had he?

All at once he had a vision of Lew Murray, the big sophomore defensive back who was a step too slow for the T. It was crazy, of course, but it nevertheless offered some strange food for thought. He was still thinking it over when at last he drifted off into uneasy slumber.

CHAPTER III

Not So Smooth Sailing

THURSDAY Al watched his warriors go through dummy scrimmage, polishing their attack for position, blind blocking angles and split second timing. He was apparently on top of them all the way, kidding, advising, demonstrating, cajoling, occasionally dropping a sharp word or two where he thought it was needed.

"How are they shaping up, honey?" Peggy asked him at dinner. She had to repeat the question twice before he heard her.

Then he started almost guiltily, managed to smile and say, "Fine, Baby. The boys look great." He put his attention back on his food, which, like everything his wife had anything to do with, was excellent. But before he had taken a third forkful of rissole potatoes his attention was elsewhere, his fork suspended halfway between plate and mouth.

After dinner Peggy kissed him, ruffled his short dark hair and said she was going out on a date with James Mason. Al grunted and said, "Tell the girls I said to watch out you don't canasta them right out of their household budget money."

When she was gone he found himself

upstairs at his desk in the study. He gave Teddy Peters' amateurish diagrams a quick run-through, cast them aside, then looked them over again. Then he got busy with blank charts, a pencil and an eraser.

The eraser got the heaviest workout for awhile. Then, frowning and humming tunelessly in his abstraction, he got out Peggy's Kingston defensive charts made the previous Saturday and studied them for a half hour. Then again he began to draw.

He was exhausted when finally he quit. Yawning, he stretched and all but upset the coffee cup at his elbow. Good old Peggy, he thought. He tasted it and it was cold. Blinking, he glanced at the banjo clock on the wall, saw that it was past two in the morning. He was still humming when he undressed hurriedly and crept into bed, careful not to wake the slumbering Peggy.

The next day was Friday and there was only a brief signal drill outside of work with the squad specialists—the passers, punters, receivers and place kickers. Al ate with the squad at training table, then, with his staff, visited the Manton headquarters at the country club and saw that the visitors were all set. After that he made a brief speech at a pre-game rally.

It was after ten o'clock when he got home and, giving Peggy a perfunctory kiss, raced upstairs to his study. He knew now that he had something, but it had been foggy, unrealized. Looking at the plays he had devised the night before with such labor, he saw that they were all wrong. He had made them too difficult.

He could still retain a flock of basic assignments if he adapted the spread more cleverly. He threw out the charts of the previous night and got to work on an entire new set. Tonight it went much more easily. When he was finished the clock showed the time to be barely after midnight.

He went into the bedroom and turned on the lights. Peggy was sitting up in

TOUCHDOWN CHORUS

bed, reading a book. He did a double take, said, "Hey—what's the idea? You can't see in the dark?"

"Just a gag, dodo," said Peggy, smiling sweetly at him. "I wanted to see if you'd notice."

They had considerable of a rough-house before the lights went out a second time and he slept right through until seven o'clock, when sportswriters, alumni and a harried assistant manager combined to get him out of the proverbial arms of Morpheus.

According to the Sunday papers, Al handled the Sentinel team masterfully ■ the Scarlet and Gray rolled over the slower-footed Manton Bulldogs by a score of 33 to 19. Al, however, wouldn't have known. He had not been concentrating on the play before him.

Instead his mind had been full of the intricacies of the brand new system he was devising for his offensive team against Kingston. Should he play one tackle wide to increase his flanker punch? How deep ought the wingbacks to be in order to have time to handle the laterals that would be coming their way? Would Ivy Rosoff be able to stand up under the pressure of blocking?

And there was always the problem of whether to play the T-veteran Si Philips or the green, less quick-starting but more versatile Lew Murray in the key fullback spot. Not to mention the matter of whether his boys would be able to master a totally new system of play with a scant five days of practise to do it in.

SUNDAY Al was like a caged bull, almost unable to wait until practise time the following week. He was tempted to call a special Sunday skull session but feared that it might take the edge off his team, which was coming up nicely for the big game.

It wouldn't be enough, of course—not unless this cockeyed new system worked. It had only a faint resemblance to the rather crude and definitely archaic plays Teddy Peters had mapped out. It was a

modern integrated thing now—if he could only integrate it.

He snapped at Peggy twice—something he virtually never did—and wondered what she would say if she knew what he was planning. Of course, she knew he was up to something. He decided, late in the afternoon, to talk it over with her. But she had gone out, leaving a note on the hall table. It read:

HAVING WONDERFUL TIME. WISH YOU WERE HERE. HOME FOR SUPPER. IT'S A GOOD THING DADDY WAS A COACH, TOO, OR I'D BE EN ROUTE TO RENO.

He grinned and decided he had been just about everything a husband to a girl like Peggy ought not to be. When she got back he kissed her and bundled her into the roadster and drove her far out of town to a roadhouse for dinner. Football wasn't mentioned once.

Monday, in the fieldhouse classroom that served for skull sessions, Al gave his gang a brief speech before putting his new system in chalk on the board. He didn't want them to think he was out of his mind and told them so.

"It might be bad for morale to have the coach go mad the week of the big game," he added, and waited for his laugh and got it. Then, unsmiling, he told them, "I saw the Kingston defense you've been reading about all season, two weeks ago when they played Army. Frankly, good as you fellows are, keyed up ■ you'll be, you won't have the chance of a snowball in Hades against it.

"For the next five days we're going to put everything we've learned this year—excepting the fundamentals, of course—on the shelf. We can only keep them from riddling us one way—by going around their flanks until they're balled up, then hitting them in the middle. And here's how we're going to do it."

Out of the corner of his eye Al could see Nick Boldini's big jaw drop as he unfolded the spread on the board and explained the basic assignments. He could sense the stir of wonder, hear the

faint surprised whispers of the squad, but he went steadily about his task of explanation and instruction.

When he had finished he laid down pointer, chalk and eraser, and faced them. "All right," he said, "that's it—or all of it I can give you without actual field demonstration. Before we go any farther I want to ask you, do you think you can do it?"

His answer was an unorganized but concerted yell. He sent the squad, except for Si Philips, Lew Murray and Rosoff, to the locker room to suit up. Save for a few minor injuries they were in top shape—and besides he had no choice but to work them hard.

"You think this is the answer?" Whelp Whelton asked him in a low voice. "It means taking a heck of a lot of long chances."

"If we don't we're cooked anyway," Al told him. Then, to Ivy Rosoff, "Ivy, it means a complete switch for you. You'll be back there with the fullback—Si or Lew—and you'll still be calling the plays. You'll be passing. But you'll be doing more blocking than you ever did in your life. How about it?"

The quarterback blinked, then grinned and drawled, "These mudpups have been saying I never get my pants mussed. Now maybe I get a chance to show them they aren't the only blockers on the squad. Who wants to play in a rocking chair forever?"

"Good boy," said Al, and meant it. "I hate to throw away your ball handling, Ivy, but for this game we'll have to."

"We may be able to work it in somewhere," Rosoff told him.

From then on it was straight hard work. Habits learned over seasons of play, habits that had become automatic, had to be undone and remade. The entire tempo of Sentinel offensive play had to be altered and relearned. It was novel and exciting at first, but excitement waned—the novelty turned to drudgery.

WEDNESDAY, when they scrimmaged the JayVees, Al was about

ready to give up. Joe Hendon and Mack Sauntry, his tackles, were falling all over their own feet, tipping plays, doing more damage to their own backfield than to the defensive line in front of them. Everyone on the team made at least two false starts and there was even one backfield collision. And Mike Fennell, the old reliable, actually pulled the old vanishing-back play with a pass between his legs that went sailing into a wide hole in the backfield.

But the chief trouble was with Lew Murray. Al had been counting on the kid to fill his made-to-order fullback spot like a second Ernie Nevers. Instead he looked like Joe Blow from Kokomo. He developed butter fingers, repeatedly started ahead of the play in his desire to get things winging, or ran the wrong way.

Si Philips did a lot better. But in his heart of hearts Al knew that Si simply wasn't enough football player to be the fullback his new formation had to have. His passes were not quite accurate enough, he was not quite tricky enough on his feet and his quick T-formation start kept fouling up the blockers ahead of him.

When it was over Al tried not to look dejected as they headed for the clubhouse. But his effort must have been hammy indeed, for Ivy Rosoff trotted up beside him and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't worry, Coach," the quarterback said. "Who ever heard of a good show not having a stinking dress rehearsal? We'll do okay."

"You're a great gang, no matter what happens," Al told him, with what he hoped would pass for a smile. "If things do go wrong, remember this whole thing is my idea and my fault."

"Don't worry, Coach," said Mike Fennell, who had come up on his other side. "We're not going to let you down."

But when at last Saturday afternoon rolled around and Kingston was gay with bunting and chrysanthemums and

pretty girls, and loud with the sounds of horns and the cries of souvenir hawkers, Al found it hard not to fear the worst.

The gang had showed signs of grasping the system he had given them—but they were prone to dreadful lapses. He told himself, as he walked slowly behind them down the ramp that led into the stadium, that he must have been out of his mind to try such a thing. He told himself that a man who would pull such a zany stunt had no right to be head coach of anything, much less a college football team. He had wanted to make good for himself and had badly let the boys down in the process.

Then the sunlight was bright on the turf and there was sound and color all around him. The stands, already three-quarters filled, were astir with the mohister sounds of *crowd*. From ground level the Blue-and-Yellow-clad Kingston squad, warming up across the field and at its far end, looked bigger and older and rougher than his own gang.

Then he was looking for Peggy, finding her in a field box behind the bench with—it couldn't be but it was—the Old Man. He gulped and went over to shake hands with his father-in-law, who had, it developed, flown from California just for the big game.

"I know you'll do us proud, Al," he said. "Your boys look good out there."

"Luck, honey," said Peggy, and somehow he liked that better. He was going to need luck and both of them knew it.

CHAPTER IV

Bad Break

A FEW moments later Al found himself shaking hands with Knockers Craig, who had come across the field to greet his freshman coaching rival and won himself a generous round of applause for his courteous gesture. Although he had seen pictures of the famed

Kingston mentor all his football life and had viewed him more than once across the width of the field, while working as backfield coach for the Old Man, it was the first time Al had met him.

Knocker's craggily handsome face, his grip of hand, to say nothing of his costly pearl grey Homburg and magnificent fleecy-white, ankle-length polo coat, were all calculated to make an impression. But even more impressive was the man's great size—he stood all of six-feet-five—and the depth and confidence of his voice.

"Hope your boys won't make it too rough on my kids," he said, and Al felt all at once like a mouse enduring the preliminary tortures of some large tomcat who liked to pretend the mouse might take him. "Heard you were up to see us play Army a couple of weeks ago. You and Baby should have stopped by. We'd have rolled out the carpet. I see the Old Man got up here today, after all."

"That's right," said Al, very conscious of his suddenly shrunken six-feet-one, his battered old fedora and the zipper-lined tweed topcoat flapping about his knees. He could have sworn that his voice quavered a trifle like some adolescent's. He managed to mouth a few more banalities, then walked back to the visitors' bench, feeling pitifully inadequate—a boy trying to do a man's job.

"What a ham that Knockers Craig is!" he heard one of his own boys murmur to a companion, as he passed along the bench, and all at once he felt a little better. His gang had faith in him, liked him. He wondered how they would feel when it was over.

Mike Fennell went out to toss against Monte Bradford, the Kingston captain. Kingston won and chose to receive, since there was no appreciable wind stirring the air in the huge stadium. This suited Al's plans perfectly, as he wanted the Kingston attack to blunt itself early against the pulverizing tackles of big Mike and Lew Murray.

"Remember, gang," he told his de-

fensive team, before they went out for the kickoff, "they'll go into punt formation on second or third down if you hold them. But watch them then. And keep on top of Monte Bradford—he's death in an open field."

He gave the nearest of them encouraging slaps and sent them on out. Mike Fennell was kicking and he got off a tremendous boot that went over the goal line and was touched down there. Play began with Kingston on its own twenty-yard line, first and ten.

Monte Bradford pulled a jump pass on the opener that clicked for eight, right between Mike and Lew Murray, who had been sucked in. They tried another instead of going for the two, and this one was batted down by Ivy Rosoff, who was playing safety man on defense as well as quarterback for the Sentinel attacking team.

Kingston went into punt formation and Monte Bradford got off a beautiful kick, angled for the sidelines, that rolled out on the Sentinel twenty-eight. Al sent in his offensive team and they went into the T. He didn't want to unveil his new formation until the second quarter—unless they found themselves a touchdown behind.

Three plays later Rosoff was kicking from his own seventeen and barely got the boot away. It was high and wobbly and the Kingston safety man caught it and stepped out of bounds just on his own side of midfield. The Blue and Yellow defense had been even more brutal than Al had expected. Their unpredictable crashes had messed up the whole attack. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his brow.

"I never saw anything like it," Nick Boldini murmured in his ear. "Brother! I'm beginning to understand." He lifted his ungloved hands surreptitiously—with fingers crossed on both of them.

"It's one of those things," Al told him out of the corner of his mouth. "Even Peggy couldn't figure out an answer to this one."

"We've got to have it ourselves

next—" began the Scarlet and Gray line coach. Then suddenly he was on his feet, yelling, "Watch Bradford, you dopes—watch Bradford!"

But Bradford, who had drifted wide, out of the defense zones of Mike Fennell and Lew Murray, had already caught a short pass in the flat, reached the sidelines and was streaking deep into Sentinel territory. Ivy Rosoff, hand-fighting a secondary blocker, was barely able to bump the Blue and Yellow star out of bounds on the twenty-six.

DIN THE next play Bradford carried, flicking a darting pass over Lew Murray's outstretched fingers into the arms of a crossing end, whose mate deposited Ivy Rosoff on his pants. The Kingston wingman, his long legs eating up great chunks of ground, got clear and won a race to the coffin corner, going over for the first tally. A moment later Jorgenson, the defensive left tackle, went in to boot the point after touchdown and put Kingston ahead by a 7-0 score.

Al sent a member of the Sentinel offensive team in with instructions for Ivy Rosoff not to open up with the new plays yet. Now that the game was actually on he was in no hurry to try it. If it fizzled, he told himself, his team would be finished. He caught Whelp Whelton's eyes on him curiously, but hunched low, saying nothing. There would be plenty of time to get going, he told himself.

Fleet Colly Palmer caught the Blue and Yellow kickoff and twisted and reversed and bulled his way up to the thirty-seven. On the first play from scrimmage Ivy Rosoff went back to pass, but Jorgenson elected to crash, fooling the Sentinel line just as he had Army's two weeks earlier. Ivy was lucky to get out of that one with no more than the loss of a pair of yards.

Sentinel took time out, and Al found himself pacing the sidelines in agony of indecision. Especially with the Old Man in the stands, he didn't want to look

TOUCHDOWN CHORUS

like a damned fool. He heard the referee whistle time in, but didn't dare look at the field. He simply couldn't watch while his boys took another of those massacres.

Then, galvanized by a roar from the stands on both sides of the field, he had to look—and saw Tip Fuller reach up to gather a Si Philips pass in his huge hands and sprint with it fourteen yards into Kingston territory before a desperation tackle spilled him.

He watched his Scarlet and Gray gang huddle, then come quickly out of it—and into the new spread. For a moment he was on the verge of sending in counter-orders. They had no business taking the bit in their own teeth that way.

Then he caught the puzzled looks toward the bench a number of Blue and Yellow players sent in mute appeal. He saw their previously razor-sharp defensive line and backers-up shuffling around like a group of Chinese waiters. He halted the orders that were on his lips and decided to wait it out. After all, he had planned to let them use it the minute they fell behind. And they were behind.

Ivy, as usual, played it smartly. He took the pass from center, paused as if to pass, then slipped the ball to Si Philips, who crossed in back of him. Si flipped a flat lateral to Red Young, out at the left halfback post far on the flank, and the rangy redhead simply exploded ahead with nothing in front of him.

They caught him on the Kingston nine more by luck than intent and Al found himself yelling in the midst of his own staff and reserves, their voices unheard even at that close range, in the vaster roar which rose from the 85,000 spectators that surrounded them.

Kingston was in trouble, no doubt about it. Knocker Craig sent in virtually an entire new defensive line, a line which opened way up to cover their hitherto exposed flanks. And Ivy Rosoff calmly sent Si Philips bulling right into the gap between guard and tackle. It looked

like a touchdown in three plays.

But Philips' T-formation habits once again betrayed him. He took off like a shot from a gun and ran right up the back of Mike Fennell, who was swinging over to block out the Blue and Yellow fullback. The play made only a scant yard. However, it served to renew confusion among the Kingston defenders.

THEY spread out differently, unable to stand shoulder to shoulder in a goal-line stand without inviting disaster—and they spread too thin. This time Ivy took a hand-off from Si Philips, moved toward his right, then lobbed a flea-flicker to Colly Palmer, the Scarlet and Gray right halfback, who was swinging hard to the left close behind the line.

Palmer snagged the ball cleanly and kept right on going. He cut sharply in toward the Kingston goal as he passed the center segment of the Sentinel forward wall. The backers-up, milling around in confusion, never laid a hand on him. He slipped diagonally through them and went over the goal line standing up. Seconds later, Ivy Rosoff easily sent the extra point through the uprights to make it a new ball game just as the first quarter ended.

For Sentinel things were jubilant, in the stands, on the bench and on the field. Al risked a glance at the field box where Peggy and her father were sitting, grinned faintly as he saw them hugging one another ecstatically and jumping up and down like kids. He had to remind himself that there were three big quarters to go.

The second quarter was not as spectacular as the opener had been. Taking the kickoff, Kingston moved viciously, doggedly, deftly downfield, picking up yards on quick-openers, on laterals, on jump passes and an occasional reverse. Monte Bradford was in top form and it looked as if they were going to score again.

They did, but not on that drive. Al

found himself screaming as the Sentinel line dug in on its own four and held the Blue and Yellow for four big downs, driving them back to the nine before taking possession of the pigskin. Again it was Lew Murray and Mike Fennell who did the heavy tackling, although the whole team was great. Al wondered what Rosoff would do now.

It was the spread again and Ivy himself, after faking both hand-off and lateral, took it himself right up the middle alley for a dozen yards, with Si Philips throwing the key block for him. And the huge crowd was on its feet again, howling its excitement.

But it was Sentinel's turn to be disappointed. Ivy Rosoff steered them all the way to the Blue and Gold nineteen-yard line, but was unable to put it over. Tip Fuller dropped a pass in the clear and then Si Philips once again blew an opportunity by over-running his own interference while the Sentinel stands groaned.

It was third down, still ten to go. Rosoff took the pass from center, unloaded it on Philips and moved in front of him to do a spot of blocking. But Philips, unwilling to repeat his error of the play before, hung back a half-second too long.

Then, when he did take off, it was too late. Jorgenson, the big Kingston left tackle, crashed into him low just as two Blue and Yellow defensive forwards from the far side of the line hit him high on that side. The ball squirted free and there was a scramble on the twenty-two, with Kingston recovering.

But the fumble was only part of the disaster. Reliable Si Philips lay face down on the turf, his left leg twisted under him at a sickening angle. There was no question about its being a break—and a bad one. Al, who felt a personal responsibility for the welfare of his kids, battled nausea as he stood by while trainer and team physician did what they could.

Philips was toted off on a stretcher and Kingston took the offensive. They

went all the way to the Sentinel three before a penalty set them back and stopped them. But Ivy Rosoff elected to quick kick on first down and the Blue and Yellow came roaring back this time not to be denied. One of their rangy ends caught a pass deep in Sentinel territory and raced the rest of the way to give Kingston what became a 14-7 lead just as the half ended.

CHAPTER V

The Big Blaze

AL DIDN'T do any pep talking between the halves. His boys were up as high as they could get and still play good football. So he simply told them he was proud of them, reminded them that they had another half in which to win the game and turned them over to his assistants for specific individual advice. He himself went into the infirmary room of the fieldhouse to check on Si Philips.

His leg had already been set and he was grinning cheerfully, smoking a cigarette. "Look," he said to Al. "No more training for me."

Al wanted to weep, but instead he managed to sit down and chat with the injured fullback, until the latter told him to get back to his football game and see to it the boys won it. "I don't want to think I got this busted gam for nothing, Coach," he said.

Naturally Al told the gang before sending them back to the field. He couldn't help it. And then he wished he had kept his big emotional mouth shut when young Lew Murray took the Kingston kickoff on the ten and went bulling up the middle, all the way to the forty—but left the ball somewhere around the twenty-five for the ubiquitous Jorgenson to fall on for the Blue and Yellow.

The big Kingston offensive eleven came boiling into the game, and some-

how Al knew it was going to be bad. He was proved a true prophet of gloom when the Blue and Yellow bulled the ball over in just five plays, leaving Mike Fennell laid out with a pulled thigh tendon on the last one, ■■■ they concentrated all their tremendous power upon him. And of course they kicked the extra point to run the score up to a dismal 21-7 total.

Again husky young Lew Murray took the kickoff and again came bulling up the middle, shedding tacklers like Bronko Nagurski in his prime. He took it all the way to midfield, and Al found himself almost frightened at the ferocity with which his boys were playing. They were ■■■ bunch of fanatical strangers to him, and he feared for the worst.

It was Murray through guard from the spread on the next play, and once more the big sophomore fumbled. Al joined the rest of the Sentinel rooters in a groan that came from his intestines—then yelled mightily ■■■ Ivy Rosoff wrestled the ball loose from a Kingston man and even managed to pick up a two-yard gain.

Again the play went to Murray, who picked up speed like ■■■ rhino as he raced into the line. But at the last second he stood up straight and winged a flat pass to Tip Fuller, who was running far out toward the sideline. The ball was right where it should have been, and Fuller snagged it over his shoulder without breaking stride, cut down the sidelines and carried clear to the fourteen.

The Scarlet and Gray still looked like ■■■ bunch of strangers to Al ■■■ they came dashing out of their huddle. The ball went again to Lew Murray, who simply took it and bulled right through the middle. Despite the fact that Mike Fennell was out of the game, Murray got good blocking—blocking which Al sus-

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pected he didn't need.

Not once did he deviate from the straight line. Two Kingston secondary defenders hit him and hit him hard, but could not get a hold on his high kicking legs to bring him down. He went almost all the way through the end zone before he stopped. Ivy Rosoff kicked the extra point serenely and they were back in the ball game on the short end of ■■■ 14-21 score.

Al sent Nate Loomis, spare defensive left tackle, in to help Lew Murray with the line backing on the kickoff that followed. And it was Loomis and Murray together who pinched Monte Bradford on the Kingston nineteen-yard line as the Blue and Yellow star sought to blast his way upfield through a funnel of blockers.

LOOMIS, apparently, caught fire from the rest of the team, for he played the game of his hitherto second-rate football life. Naturally Kingston figured him the weak link. But two plunges and a pass directed his way left them still four yards short of ■■■ first down.

Bradford booted and Ivy Rosoff managed to snag his soaring spiral on the Sentinel twenty-two before it could roll out of bounds. He eel-hipped his way past a Blue and Yellow end and took it along the sidelines to the thirty-eight, a good runback.

"They don't know the answer!" Whelp Whelton shouted in Al's left ear as Sentinel went into its new spread and the Kingston defensive forwards shifted position uneasily, not knowing how to stop the strange formation. Al simply nodded and grinned.

Ivy Rosoff took the pass from center and handed off to Lew Murray, who moved from behind him right toward the Blue and Yellow defensive left tackle. He hit that individual so hard that he literally bounced from the cold turf, cut wide, cut back, reversed his field and went threading all the way down to the four.

On the next play he took it over with half the home team hanging on to him. And although Ivy's kick for the tying point was deflected by Jorgenson's big palms, somehow no one in the stadium felt that this setback was going to cost Sentinel a tie score.

IT DIDN'T. Kingston was definitely demoralized after its victorious season. They got a drive started after the kickoff, but it bogged down short of midfield and Monte Bradford's boot failed to find the sideline and went over the Sentinel goal for a touchback. So it was first and ten on the twenty for the Scarlet and Gray.

The quarter ended before play was resumed and then Sentinel seemed to explode with Lew Murray as the detonator. In a formation made to order for his style of play, he simply drove the opposition crazy. He passed and ran and used his blockers like a veteran as he played main cog in the Sentinel march to the touchdown that put them in the lead, 27-21, for the first time since the game began.

Then, when the Blue and Yellow got its last threat rolling, it was Lew Murray whose line-backing tackles forced them into a desperation fourth-down pass—and it was Lew Murray who snagged the ball and raced seventy-seven yards with it for another Sentinel score. The final touchdown for the Scarlet and Gray, in the closing second of the game on a sneak by Ivy Rosoff, was almost anticlimax. When the final gun cut the autumn air the upset was in the bag with Sentinel the winner by a 41-21 total.

Al wanted to go away and hide for awhile, just to think over what the kids had done for him, but he never had the chance. He was hoisted up on a pair of padded shoulders and snake-danced through the jubilant overflowing throng of Sentinel fans until at last the field-house door was reached. He was suddenly glad the kids had wanted to do it for him and he stopped wanting to go

off by himself and hide.

"What a coach!" Ivy Rosoff shouted. "What a coach! He has the answers to everything. When he sees we can't beat 'em one way, he comes up with a brand new system that does the trick."

"The Jeffries Flanker System," said Nick Boldini, giving Al's hand a friendly squeeze. "I've got a hunch it's going to be as famous as the Minnesota Shift, the T, or the Warner Double Wing."

"But it isn't really my idea at all," Al protested. He was still in a group by the fieldhouse door with turmoil milling around him. Suddenly he spotted a jovial red-faced little man and pointed at him, saying, "There's the guy who invented it—Teddy Peters. Hey, Mr. Peters, come over here."

Peters came over and Al told the story to his gang and a few alumni and sports writers who had joined the group. Teddy Peters beamed and said, "Mr. Jeffries, if your wife hadn't called the Inn and asked me over for dinner I'd never have had the nerve. She's a wonder, that girl you married—a wonder."

"Yeah," said Al, and some of the gladness drained out of him. "She's terrific, all right." He stayed with the chatter for a few more minutes, but his heart wasn't in it. He went inside and thanked the boys and told them to come to his place for a blowout the following Friday night. But their spontaneous cheers for him caused him embarrassment rather than joy. He was, he thought, a fraud. Peggy had rigged the whole business for him.

He got away as soon as he could and decided to face facts. There was no sense kidding himself—he couldn't go through life letting Peggy do his job for him and do it better than he could. It wasn't jealousy—it was simply a matter of feeling that he was doing a job at all. She had tried to cover up, of course, with the ridiculous Teddy Peters subterfuge, but it came out the same.

PEGGY and the Old Man were waiting for him. She threw her arms

TOUCHDOWN CHORUS

around him and hugged him and said, "Oh, Al, you were wonderful. The boys were wonderful. Everything's wonderful."

"A grand job, Al," said the Old Man in his distant-avalanche rumble of a voice. "I just talked with Knocker. He looks as if the stadium had a roof and it fell in on him." Then, studying the younger man more keenly, he said, "But what's the matter with you, son? You don't look happy about it."

"I'm not," Al said bluntly. "Baby, we might as well have this out right now. What was the idea of rigging that Teddy Peters deal on me? I know you're smarter than I am. You don't have to go."

"But I don't know what you mean," Peggy protested, and the sincerity in her voice made Al waver. "I didn't rig anything with Mr. Peters. All I know is, I got a note from Dad here asking me to ask him for dinner when he hit town."

"Then you mean you didn't figure out this spread as the answer to Knocker's defense?" Al asked.

"I swear I didn't, honey," said Peggy earnestly. "I thought I had an answer—I wanted you to pound the center of their line to pieces—but Dad showed me it wouldn't work. Why, when I saw you were actually using Mr. Peters' spread, I nearly fell out of my seat. Honestly, Al, you could have knocked me down with a brick."

"Okay, Peg," said Al, and his grin was real this time. "I guess we'll have to un-

veil this as the Teddy Peters' Spread." He turned to the Old Man, who had been regarding them sardonically, chewing on his cigar. "How about that, sir?"

"Don't call me 'sir.' I'm no knight and you're a man," the Old Man told him. "If you do call it that I'm going to sue for infringement of copyright. What you used today is a variation on the old Biff Lawrence Spread. I used it from nineteen-twenty to twenty-five right at Sentinel—until the single wing drove it out. Knocker doesn't go back that far. So he didn't know how to stop it."

Peggy, who had been regarding her father with an odd look of distrust, suddenly said, "Dad—did you put Teddy Peters up to coming to see us with those play charts?"

"Guilty," he said, grinning, "but don't shoot, kids. I knew what Knocker was doing—I saw the Stanford game—and I couldn't have my kids take a beating from him their first year. You know I don't want to meddle in your affairs, but after all, you're all the family I've got, and Sentinel is my college and . . ."

Al bent over and bussed the Old Man on the check. At least the Old Man had given him the option of turning his suggestion down. And Peggy had been absolutely wrong for once without hurting anyone. And the boys had played the game of their lives—and won.

He linked arms with Peggy and his father-in-law and said, "Come on, gang, let's celebrate."

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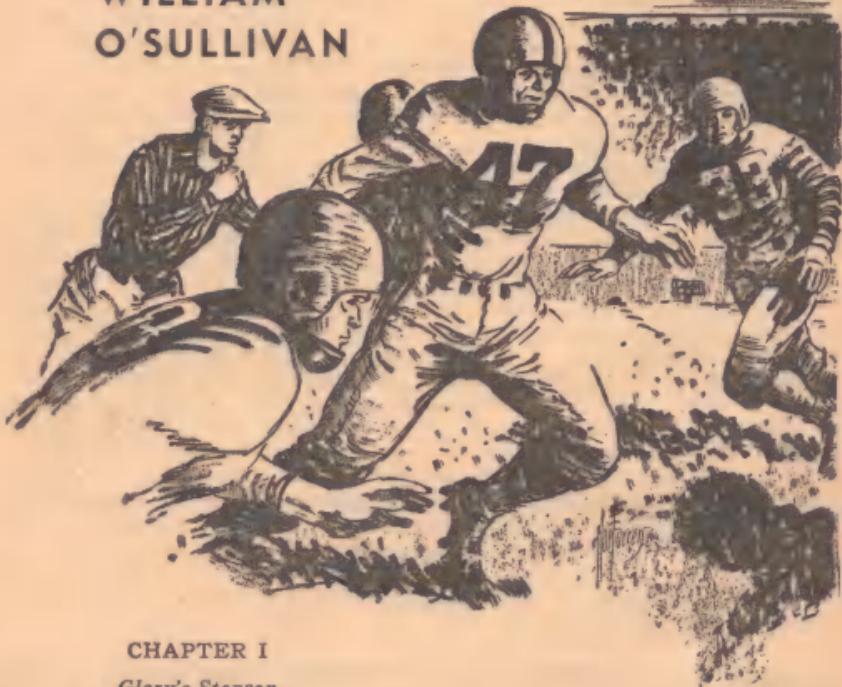
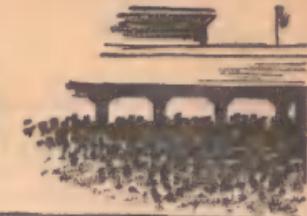
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CHAPTER I

Glory's Stepson

IT WAS fourth and inches to go on the Western forty-yard stripe, and the State stands were in a ferment of excitement.

Picked to win by at least eighteen points, the big State team that had been ill-starred for two consecutive and highly touted years was finally on the move in the late fourth period.

A quarterback sneak behind the big

and full-of-fight line could make it first and ten, again. With Western's game but light defenses weakening under the renewed sledge-hammer smashes of the tragically stalemates State offensive machine, a first down now was almost sure to produce the score that would match the Westerners' 6 points—and Johnny Gerrard hadn't missed a point-after in thirty-three pre-season practice shots.

Johnny Gerrard played the System straight down
the line, punting and bucking the line when
the System called for a punt or line-buck
—until he got fed up with it,
but good!



North Central ■■■ stunned by
the amazing sight of Johnny
"The Doctor" Gerrard actually
carrying the ball

The clock showed five minutes to go.

Gerrard, his gray eyes adding up the factors, wheeled into the huddle, and said crisply, "Wide punt formation, gang. I'm not angling it for the sidelines. We want to nail them behind the twenty with the ball. Okay, let's—"

"Aw, Cripes, Johnny, tear the book up and let's win this one," Butch Brice, the huge center, growled. "Three inches, or

maybe two, we need!"

In the huddle, Johnny looked about at the other tense faces and didn't care that he saw agreement there with Brice. "Wide punt formation, I said!" He snapped, and licked his bruised lips with a dry tongue. "I'll play fifteen yards back for my kick, and there shouldn't be any excuse for even a five-yard runback. Got it? Now, let's not argue."

The whistle shrilled and the stripe-shirted official was in and pouncing on the ball to move it five yards back as a penalty for delaying the game. But it meant nothing to Johnny Gerrard, other than the fact that the penalty moved the burden to his argumentative mates and made the wisdom of kicking patent to all of them now.

"Okay, want to run the play, or do we want to get pushed back another five?" he growled. The eyes that met his in the huddle were resentful, but resigned. "Make the pass clean, Butch," he cautioned, and then they were breaking from the huddle.

HE HAD a brief instant to regret Coach Jiggs O'Mara's repeated disavowal of running the game from the bench when "The Coach on the Field" was there. He had a resentful wish that his teammates, as well as the sports writers, would realize that the Gerrard System and the O'Mara system were one for the good and simple reason that he, Johnny Gerrard, had never played for any other coach but big, burly and laughing Jiggs O'Mara.

From the time he had come onto the gridiron for Coltonville High, back in the hard-coal country where Jiggs O'Mara was coaching, through the starring and publicized years of high-school football and to the ivied campus of State when that down-on-its-football-luck university offered Jiggs a contract and got three-quarters of the Coltonville High team with him, the O'Mara System had been ingrained into Johnny until it was so much the only one he knew that calling it "The Gerrard System" could brook no argument.

Besides, Johnny Gerrard saw the usefulness of accepting big Jiggs O'Mara's implied compliment that he, Johnny, was not only the most publicized triple-threat man in modern football but a match for almost any coach in his field generalship.

True, it had hurt in Johnny's sophomore year when the conservative methods had

brought up two ties with supposedly weak teams and a loss to Eastern University, traditional and powerful State rival.

And last year's last-quarter loss to a gone-wild Eastern U. team had cost Johnny selection on the All-American first team and relegated him to a tie with Cookie Mestres on the mythical third team. But Johnny's leg injury, sustained in an almost precedent-shattering instance of ball carrying early in the season, had Johnny all but out of the running as it was.

The O'Mara System—or the Gerrard System, whichever—called for the T-quarterback to hold himself aloof from anybody or brain-jarring shocks. But a quarterback sneak had seemed called for in the game against Southern Reserve and Johnny had listened to his mates—and then to the doctor saying, "Four or five weeks ought to see you back in."

Johnny wasn't making that mistake again. Not with this, his last year, before the pro-football draft system called him on to the goal which was part and parcel of Johnny's ambition and had been since he had trotted out, a lanky, cool-eyed kid with shifty hips and a grim mouth, to try out for Coltonville High.

Football had been good to Johnny. And Johnny had been good to football. Johnny hadn't wrapped up "the book" and thrown it in desperation when his team was one point behind or fourteen points behind. That wasn't savvy. That wasn't football. That wasn't The System. The O'Mara System or the Gerrard System. That was Dick Merriwell stuff and maybe it sold stories to magazines.

But it hadn't moved the Widow Gerrard from Coltonville's "Smoke Hill" area to a neat bungalow on the right side of the tracks. And it hadn't got Johnny Gerrard a reputation for brains that earned him a job in the engineering department of the Colton Colliery. And it hadn't got Johnny Gerrard to State the way Johnny was going through State. And the pro game was just ahead.

Western's cohorts were chanting in

unison to "Block that kick!" when Johnny rubbed his hands on his nylon pants and got his stance comfortable and easy.

The ball came back in a slightly wild pass that Johnny might have bobbled if he hadn't been utterly relaxed in the roaring din of voices, and even watching for just such a snapback.

He jumped, jabbed out his hands, had the ball, came down carefully, watching how his feet contacted the cleat-torn turf, and he boomed a high and far-reaching spiral straight down the middle from his own forty.

A frenzied Western blocker was sailing through the air in a roaring dive that missed the block. Johnny calculated the punt, let his gaze go doubtfully to his wide-spread line, now racing hard down-field, and he had an instant in which to duck the blocker. He didn't use that instant.

HE ROLLED over and over, his relaxedness taking the shock of the brutally heavy body contact as an acrobat takes a tumble, and he saw the handkerchief go down on the play even as he watched from his knees Keats Salmon and Dude Taggart miss the Western receiver, and saw him start back up-field with his men doing a terrific blocking job ahead of him.

From the ten, where he had caught it, and back to the five to spill Keats and Dude harmlessly before he reversed himself, the Western sprint-back roared up over the twenty, the thirty, reversed his field to gain the forty, and then staged a parade of it down the sidelines past the Western bench, which had gone mad.

Johnny watched with phlegmatic eyes and shrugged to Scooter Clett and Barney Hisston when his backfield mates raced up, screaming angered questions at him as to why he hadn't tried to stop the play.

"There's a handkerchief on the play," Johnny said. "Take it easy, it's all coming back again."

"Maybe we were offside!" Hisston, the fullback, screamed. "Maybe we were off-

side, Johnny, and you read it wrong. Western will refuse the penalty, naturally."

"The handkerchief is back where I got sloughed." Johnny shrugged, his voice mild. "Nobody could have been offside there. It's our ball, first and ten, from the Western thirty, I figure."

The Western stands booed and groaned and rent the air with their rage when the play came back and the signal was shot to the stands—roughing the kicker.

Johnny went into instant action as soon as the ball was downed, and the bushed Western players called for time, and the timekeeper warned, "You've had your four this half, captain."

Butch Brice shook his head in silent wonder and stared at Johnny. It was Joey Streeter, son of Coltonville's second-ranking socialite family and shifty-running State halfback, who said it for Butch and the others of them.

"Boy, what luck!" Streeter said, his dark eyes on Johnny. "You even look good on the bum calls, Johnny."

"I'll say," Keats Salmon chimed in. "Eh, Dude?"

Johnny looked at his two ends without rancor and said, "Well, figure it this way—you two were unlucky when you missed your downfield assignments. It's good for us somebody was lucky."

The ends subsided, the time-out period was up, the official moved in and paced the ball five yards more, breaking every heart in the Western stands, and Johnny bent over in the huddle.

"Number Seventy-one," he said. "Streeter carrying in a double-reverse. And see if we can't have some men in position for a lateral, if we need it, eh, fellows? Hep!"

The State forwards battled the insurging linemen while Johnny took the hand-back, jammed it toward in-crashing Hisston in a beautiful fake that looked like a fullback plunge, and then whipped it home to Clett coming around. Clett did a bit of magic in handing the ball off to Streeter and kept going, drawing the

defense his way. The stands erupted in a roar when Streeter cut back inside the blocked-out end and the spilled right tackle of Western to break into the open. Big Barney Hisston cut over a few yards beyond him and to his rear, careful to thread inside the line-marker.

The Western right halfback stormed over, the fullback closing with him, and when they had Joey Streeter hemmed in safely, that powerful, suave and good-looking athlete flipped the ball in a lateral that Hisston cradled and reversed back inside with.

The play carried to the Western one-yard line before the frantic goal-line defenders slammed it down. Johnny clapped his hands and yelled his gang into a fast huddle, to keep pushing the demoralized enemy.

It was Streeter who asked, almost casually, "Forty-five, Johnny? The quarterback sneak for the score?"

Johnny said, "Eighty-two. Hisston on a straight plunge. Make it good, Barney. Hep!"

Western would be expecting just that. They would get it. They would get it again and again, if need be, until Hisston broke their line and them with their line. That would sink them!

CHAPTER II

Bittersweet

JOHNNY slammed the ball hard to Hisston's midriff when the big, burly back bruised in and slugged the line. The striped arms of the official went high and State's stands roared salvo after salvo of cheers down on the heads of the dejected Westerners. The ball was picked up, the yardage marched off, the ball put down, and Johnny went back to kick the point-after.

He knew the others were hoping he would maybe call a fancy pass play. But this had to be good. It couldn't be bob-

bled, fumbled, stopped. It was 6-6 now, and with that extra point State might pry open that obstinate, rugged defensive game that Western had brought against them. And they needed that to happen to come away from the game with more than just a puny one-point win. This opener was a flop, and Johnny knew it.

Dink Mehaffey came in to kneel and hold the ball when it came to him in the snap-back. Johnny eyed the uprights, nodded his satisfaction at the fingermark Dink made on the ground in silent question, and when the ball was passed back and heeled down, he moved with relaxed precision.

Right, left—bang the foot!

The kick spun high and end over end backwards and a civil engineer's transit couldn't have split the uprights more exactly.

With the time remaining what it was, and the score what it was, The System—which Johnny Gerrard had played under O'Mara until it was all but indistinguishable from his own soul—called for a flat-ball kickoff that left a minimum of danger of being run back for a score, or even a sizable distance.

Johnny held up an index finger to the officials and to the Western captain, got a finger back in return and trotted forward in timed cadence, the whistle shrill ing as his foot met the ball.

It skittered sidewise across the center stripe, bounced sharply, struck against an inrushing guard's leg and hit high into the air. Johnny didn't have to break stride to take it as he raced across the Western thirty. But when he was hemmed in, he saw Hisston streaming along in position for the lateral. Johnny threw it and took out the would-be tackler with a half-block that slowed the man while it didn't jar up Johnny.

The play scored all the way and Johnny made good the second point-after. And with the next kickoff, Western threw caution to the winds and passes with abandon. Johnny intercepted one at midfield and raced it to the thirty before he lateraled it to Joey Streeter. The

Coltonville socialite bulled his way to the Western ten before he was dropped with a savage tackle. Johnny clapped his fellow townsmen on the back mechanically as he helped him up, and eyed the clock with a sharp calculation.

A minute and two seconds to go.

The System called for possession of the ball and Johnny's blasted hopes of the past two years called for another score. Three scores in two minutes elapsed, in a game between two major teams, would make up for the earlier stalemate of the afternoon.

Streeter was called on for two off-tackle smashes that carried to the two. Hisston's buck came up next, and he was going over when the gun smacked flatly in the uproar.

Johnny made it twenty-one with another cold and precise boot, and up in the pressbox, a celebrated writer hunched over his portable and tapped out:

Doctor Johnny Gerrard took a cool fifty-eight minutes to anesthetize the patient, Western University, and then proceeded to remove the heart of the hard-fighting Westerners in three deft, sure strokes.

But it was State's first break of the game that gave the cold and calculating pigskin-surgeon his first chance. If Mauler Weft hadn't roughed the kicker in a berserk charge, when Doctor Johnny was punting on fourth down, State might still be looking for that score to tie a gallant Western eleven.

But once the patient was prone, Doc Johnny had a sharp knife and a sure hand. Perhaps this is the year that State cashes in on its unkept promises to its alumni, hungry these past years for an unbeaten-untied season. Maybe this is the year fortune will smile on its celebrated step-child, Johnny Gerrard.

COACH O'Mara had a special private wink for Johnny when the team hit the locker rooms of the great new stadium that was at once State's home grounds and the home of Johnny Gerrard and many of the other athletes.

The training table was in a prominent location in the huge Commons, as the student dining hall was called, for psychological reasons. O'Mara believed in keeping his boys in full view of the large mass of the students, to remind each group of its obligation to the other.

But other than some of the fraternity members who could afford rooms in their respective "houses," State had both quarters for its top-ranking athletes and so-called duties which the athletes were fancied to perform in return, as required by the Conference rules.

Some of the athletes were carried on the stadium rolls as janitors, their duties being to flip oil-furnace switches on or off, as the requirement of the weather might be. Some were listed as watchmen, with their assignment the stadium. Still others conducted occasional inventories of such equipment as lockers, shower fixtures, steam-boxes and the like, and were listed as bookkeepers.

Johnny didn't question the athletic policy which he found prevailing at State coincident with Jiggs O'Mara's hiring as head coach. And if a disparity between State's policy and the policies of many of State's rivals was apparent to him, it was also apparent to him that others of State's rivals also paid fancy salaries to their athletes in return for a modicum of some fancied "work."

Johnny regarded it as very lucky indeed that his engineering education landed him a job in that department of the Colton Colliery Company in the summer months, and if Cyrus Colton, the head of the great coal-mining company, was also a patriotic State "Old Grad" and a former football "Great," he was also the owner of the mine in which Johnny's father had died in that disastrous fire twelve years before.

And if Colton Company policy was that certain executives should be accorded living quarters in the form of neat and flower-edged bungalows, and be permitted to use Colton Company automobiles for transportation, Johnny was glad of it so that he could move his mother out of the shack on Smoke Hill and make things easier for her not only during the summer months he worked for Cyrus Colton, but during the college months when he was mostly away.

His pleasure at being able to do this for his mother so soon, even before he

was through college, had been dampened by the way in which the calm-eyed, graying little lady who was his mother had taken it, at first.

"Oh, I don't know, son," Mrs. Gerrard had murmured, when Johnny had enthusiastically outlined the move and how it was possible—through his working summers for Cyrus Colton. "Your father and I were happy here. True, he was a superintendent and didn't have to live on Smoke Hill. But he was among his men and he was nearer his work."

When Johnny had persisted, his mother had argued, "But won't it be—different? I mean, between you and Marya Colton? Not that she isn't a fine, democratic girl, son, don't misunderstand me." The mild gray eyes had had an anxious moment of it. "But—well, now you are Johnny Gerrard, her favorite beau and the high-school football hero. This other way, you'll be one of Cyrus Colton's employees. It may make a difference to you, Johnny."

"Mom, what a crazy idea!" Johnny had said hotly. "Excuse me, Mom, I mean a— a weird idea. Marya democratic? You bet she must be, driving over here to Smoke Hill to call on you, or to pick me up for a school dance, or whatever. Gee, Mom, what's the matter—don't you want to live in a nicer section?"

Mrs. Gerrard had smiled instantly and taken Johnny's young hand in her own work-roughened ones, and said, "I guess I'm just old and silly. I hadn't thought of it your way, I guess, John. Of course I'd like to live where you'd be proud to have me live. And I think it is wonderful of you to be thinking of me instead of considering just yourself."

BUT to Johnny's distress, he heard that his mother had moved back to live with some neighbors on Smoke Hill a few weeks after Johnny had gone off to college that second year. For all of which she moved back to the Rose Gardens Manor cottage when Johnny came home for Thanksgiving and Christmas, and of course she had done so throughout

the summers when Johnny was working in the Colliery engineering office.

Marya had gone East to Sarah Lawrence College, blasting Johnny's hopes—as well as those of Joey Streeter and Keats Salmon and Dude Taggart and Cuddy Lambert—that since State was a co-ed school, the slender and lovely blonde daughter of Cyrus Colton would matriculate at her father's Alma Mater also.

And if Marya hadn't been much in evidence for those first two summers, it was because she had been away, traveling with her mother and a younger sister. But she wrote to him. She wrote to him a lot. That is, at first she did.

And last summer, although she was home, Johnny didn't have time for the country club, and besides if he had had it, there was a rule that Coltonville residents couldn't be guests more than once in three months if they weren't members.

So Johnny had been able to take her to only the Harvest Ball Dance. But he was glad, if his mother noticed how little he saw of Marya, that she didn't allude to it, because he knew Marya wasn't that kind of girl. He knew Marya wouldn't care a rap if Johnny, or any other fellow she liked, worked for her father, or for the brewery, or—or what. Not if she liked him, she wouldn't.

And Johnny was working for her father, not just loafing on the job. He was going to play pro football, but he wanted to have his engineering to slide into after a few good big years in the big-time game. To make his mark, to get his stake for the first few years of his workaday life.

While it wasn't much, Johnny was proud of what he had been able to do to make his mother's life better. And he was proud to play for State, proud to be able to get the education his father had always vowed he would have, proud that Jiggs O'Mara should treat him as an equal, almost, deferring to Johnny's judgment very often in the matter of letting Johnny run his team the way Johnny wanted to run it.

Sure, it had hurt when they had been tied by weaker teams. And when they had lost to Eastern U. two years running. For the O'Mara faith in Johnny was widely known, and it was Johnny, not Jiggs, who got the going-over from the local sports-writers for those ties and defeats.

So for all his early pleasure at his success, Johnny Gerrard knew the bittersweet taste of disappointment mixed with pleasure.

And he knew it would lose its sweetness and become sour, acrid, without alleviating sweetness, if he didn't make the grade this year in a big way.

His mother wasn't as happy as Johnny had hoped she would be, with the new move. But Johnny told himself it was perhaps because he was away and she was alone so much.

Marya was a stranger, almost. More a memory than a living reality. But Johnny told himself that was because she had been away to college herself for two years. But she was back at Coltonville now, and Johnny had heard she was going to do Social Service work among the poorer families of the area.

Johnny's own teammates were not the carefree, jolly friends they had once been with him. But Johnny told himself that was because he had to think of them as machines, or as "men" in a checker game, rather than as teammates. And it was because he wanted to pick his men and his plays with scrupulous impartiality that Johnny had decided in his frosh year to not join a frat. He didn't want anything to suggest he was playing favorites with anyone. But it all added up to the same thing—bittersweet.

CHAPTER III

Discord

CATCHING Jiggs' wink now, in the dressing room, Johnny flushed quickly and bent over to tug his shoes off.

O'Mara came over with his heavy tread, his blue eyes mirthful when Johnny looked up at him.

"Cute game, Johnny, cute game! You just did pull that one out of the fire, didn't you?"

Not "good" game, nor "swell" game, but—cute.

Johnny held the mentor's gaze a moment before he asked, "Cute game?"

O'Mara's grin held. "That time you got roughed. What were you thinking about that you didn't duck? Or didn't you have time? Did it only look to me like you did?"

Johnny held his voice steady to say, "I was watching the punt and I wanted to see how Dude and Keats were covering it." He pondered. "I dunno, maybe I did stay up too long. But I wanted to see, and next thing I knew—blooey!"

O'Mara laughed. "Blooey, and first down." He winked again, then let his face unwrinkle to cold sober. "Luck or no, cute or an accident, it's lucky you pulled it. Cy Colton and a few others of the Athletic Board are tired of waiting for our Big Year. The way they talk, this is going to be it, or else. I'm counting on you to make it come out right, Johnny. You almost missed today."

Johnny's disappointments welled up in him again, and he felt his temper slipping, but he clamped his mouth hard shut and pulled his stockings off. O'Mara held his head cocked down to him.

"I've asked for a lot for you, Johnny, and got it."

Johnny's ire was climbing back up again. "Only for me, coach?"

O'Mara shrugged, and in the slight silence the hiss of the steaming showers came loud. "For what of the other boys needed it, also, I asked and got." He added, "But especially for you."

"And nothing for yourself, of course?" Johnny asked, his eyes flaming to catch fire from his cheeks. "Not much, hey?"

He was instantly sorry he had let his temper slip its moorings, but it burned him that O'Mara didn't think he, Johnny, felt badly about missing All-American

twice running, let alone the team not coming through.

Jiggs O'Mara's eyes flamed back at him, but the older man had his control again in an instant. "You forget you have the reputation of running your own team once it takes the field, Johnny. Me, all I can do is pass on my coaching and my experience, and hope for the best. That and give the word to you that we come through this year or I won't be the only one sorry around here." He reminded Johnny, "I've spent my time on you, and it was me who got you your chance."

Johnny said, "You've also ingrained your system into me so that my choice of plays is pretty well your own choice of plays. Not that I'm kicking. I think they're the right ones. It's just that—oh, gee, I don't know—when the breaks are against us, why blame it all on me?"

"I'm not, I'm just warning you."

Johnny could grin at that. "A heck of a time to warn me, yes? In my Senior year? If I flop—I mean, have bad luck again, I'm through anyway this year."

"You mean with college," Jiggs O'Mara grinned back, but not in mirth. "I don't think you quite get what I mean. The Athletic Board isn't going to maintain quarters and a training table for losing teams. They can get those for nothing. But maybe you have that all figured out and can go it the rest of the way on your own if they put the crusher on me."

Johnny sat shocked with the threat of the thing. He was able to get by. Just barely. As things were now. His eyes were still round in wonder on O'Mara's when Jiggs laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Johnny, you and I have been too close, mean too much to each other, to pop off this way," he said gently. "I just want to get across to you that I'm—well, worried. That was close out there today. If we hadn't got that penalty break—if that is what it was—and if Western hadn't folded like a flat purse, we'd have been sunk. Just remember that you and I are very dependent on one another."

"Now, get over your grouch and your

disappointment with the past two years and settle your heart and soul on this year," he went on in a low voice. "This is it, pal. One slip and we're down. I got that straight from the horse's mouth. Let's get together tomorrow for a private skull session on Southern Reserve. I'll have the scouts' diagrams and we can figure what we have to show of our new stuff for them, if any." The big man winked again, and grinned. "Shake, kid? It's the stretch-run for us both."

Johnny shook, his apology for his temper in his eyes.

WHEN he was nearly dressed, Keats and Joey Streeter came by and stopped.

"Hey, you ready, keed?" Keats hailed Johnny. "I promised Marya we'd snag you for dinner over at the house. Come on."

Johnny stepped up his pace, snapping his tie on and giving it the quick and accurate pull into place, and slid into his tweed jacket. Keats Salmon and Joey Streeter belonged to Chi Mu, one of the best "houses" on Club Street. It would be a treat to eat there, good grub though the training table put out. And seeing Marya again would be nice.

The old and ever-new pleasure the girl's friendly and easy greeting gave Johnny was somewhat dimmed by the questioning, almost hard glance her tycoon father bent on him, when they joined them.

"How are you, Gerrard?" Cyrus Colton greeted him, giving Johnny a brief handshake. "You sort of squeaked this one through, didn't you, with a little luck? Or was it luck?"

"Dad!" Marya laughed. "It was sheer genius and ability. Johnny, you were wonderful! You looked the least concerned of anybody in the entire, jam-packed stadium."

"Wish we could ask you to dinner with us, Gerrard," the elder Colton said, then. He ignored the startled looks Johnny's two mates and Marya bent on him. "This is Chi Mu homecoming day, you know.

Fall reunion. It is a strict rule that none but members and their families may attend. The place will be a madhouse, as it is."

"Then let's eat at the Inn," Marya suggested instantly.

"Sorry, my plans are made," Colton said suavely. But there was no rancor, no unfriendliness, in the man's voice or manner, and Johnny was recalling it was Chi Mu's big day. "I don't intend to miss a shindig like this, and I want you with me, Marya. How is your mother, Gerrard? Well, I hope?"

"Just fine, Mr. Colton," Johnny replied, nodding his thanks to the kindly question. "Fine — silk, her last letter said."

"Give her my regards when you write. I was always very fond of your mother and father, Gerrard. Fine people, and your father was a good mining man. Well, nice to have seen you."

And Johnny was saying his farewell to Marya almost before he had had a proper chance to say hello, and she was half promising they would see him the next day at Chapel, or maybe later.

Johnny pondered Colton's manner and he had to admit it was not unfriendly. But he was also forced to admit to himself that it wasn't friendly, either.

It was almost the manner of an employer toward an employee. An employee for whom the employer didn't care particularly, outside of office hours.

"So what?" Johnny asked himself harshly, as he made his way down the elm-lined street towards the Commons. "I'm pulling my weight in what I do, and I'm too busy going places to notice if Colton likes me or doesn't like me. A good steak and an early sit-in at the movies — and maybe I'll take Bootsie Durhan, if she isn't dated already."

But he knew he wouldn't. He was suddenly very tired and the taste in his mouth was more, or was it less, than bittersweet.

Johnny wondered how it was that the joy could go out of your life so fast you wondered how long it was since you'd

ever really had it. Maybe you'd been kidding yourself and your joy was something else than joy. Maybe you had been so busy with your plans and your dreams and your ambitions that suddenly you looked up and wondered where the joy of a year or four years ago had gone?

But he was young and the crowd at Commons was yippingly glad to see him, and the steaks were extra thick and juicy and materially life was good anyway, and Johnny was fiercely determined to keep it so.

STATE invaded Dixie for the Southern Reserve game, and Johnny and his mates of the State offensive eleven watched in amazement while the Southerners took the kickoff and went for a score without once surrendering the ball.

Coastal had walloped the Rebs 54 to 7 last week, yet here were the supposedly inept Southerners working passes and hipper-dipper with all the aplomb of a championship outfit.

Button-hook passes for short gains. Quick opening bucks that chomped off respectable yardage. Magical stuff in back of the line that flowered into long, long passes downfield which split the State defense even if they didn't click. Then the short, sharply-rifled passes for sure gains again.

"Hey, maybe that was printed wrong," Joey Streeter said dryly, on the bench. "Maybe it was Reserve 54, Eastern 7."

The gang laughed, but not Johnny nor Jiggs with them. The coach said, "This is the stuff they would have saved for later in the season, if they'd looked good against Eastern. They missed Eastern, now they are pointing for us."

"We got fifty-six minutes left," Johnny said. "Let them bush themselves."

The Southern Reserve bunch didn't miss. They made the score with an end run by a low-slung, speedy scatback and nailed the point-after on top of it. And when Jiggs O'Mara sent his offensive eleven out to the rocketing cheers of the State faithful, the Reserve team stood pat.

"This is it," Johnny knew, as he pictured with uneasy foresight what lay ahead. "This is the way it will be all season—with each of the teams facing us pointing for this one game. One game for them, but each and every game for us. Sudden-death stuff, like in hockey. Everybody gunning for us—and one slip and we're through."

Scooter Clett yelped, as they lined up to receive the kickoff, "Let's open the bag, Johnny, and let 'em see our samples!"

Johnny shook his head in mild impatience. Eastern would be scouting their every move, would be charting plays, watching for tipoff signs in the line, in the backfield. They'd play it straight and down the middle, with a minimum of showing anything Eastern or the other rivals ahead could look for as the pressure increased. And the pressure would increase with each game that State played, Johnny knew.

The kick came high and hard to Hisston, and interference formed to sweep upfield, Johnny directing the start of the runback from the calculatedly safe position he dropped to as they started upfield.

"Spread out a bit for possible laterals, if it looks safe," he cautioned. "The left side looks best if we can get by the first two tacklers!"

State's adherents roared their glee when the play broke over the twenty, crossed the thirty with Hisston bulling over a would-be smearer, and cut for the sidelines. Then suddenly there were more men than Hisston could duck or bull over.

Streeter was running hard and to Hisston's left and slightly in back of him. Hisston saw, and he let it go in a lateral just as Johnny saw something else and shouted a warning. But it was too late.

The ball was an inviting cookie hanging sweet and brown in the air when that Reserve speedster boiled in at full tilt to take the intended lateral in a blazing interception. The Reb stands stood and screamed when the ball shuttled back over the thirty, the twenty, the ten.

Johnny made the tackle with a desperation lunge, on the four, and when he came up he saw the defensive outfit coming back in. The jeers of the Southern Reserve rooters were sour accompaniment all the way to the bench.

Jiggs eyed Johnny in silent question and the quarterback shrugged. "They played it smart leaving that speedy boy in there instead of working the platoon system as soon as they scored," he said, when he dropped down next to Jiggs. "I saw it coming and yelled, but Barney didn't hear me yell."

"Aw, for Cripes' sake!" the big full-back growled, his face red. "Who was it said to use a lateral on the run-back? I'm getting sort of fed with this business of you telling every step we should take and then squawking out of it if the play goes wrong." The flat-faced, powerful climax runner looked around him at his near mates. "Right, gang?"

"Cut the arguing," Jiggs said in a tired voice.

But Hisston was hot and bothered and not taking orders. "I wouldn't mind so much if Johnny even got into a play now and then, but to have him in that wrapped-in-cellophane pose of his and then pulling Monday-quarterback stuff if it blows up, or taking full credit if it goes right—nuts to that!"

"I told you to shut up," Jiggs said, but without rancor. Johnny thought it was almost sympathy that he detected in the coach's tone. "You'll need your breath, all of you, in another few seconds."

CHAPTER IV

Sudden Death

THE Rebels unleashed their speedster again, and he took it over from his quarterback position in a beautifully executed sneak for the second score. He carefully chiseled the extra point to add to the thirteen already on the board, with

a perfect dropkick.

"My, my!" Hisston said sourly, as the State offensive unit got ready to go in again. "That Cookie Mestres must have been reading up some *old* football stuff! Imagine a quarterback not alone playing, but even acting like he is enjoying it!"

Johnny flushed, but he didn't say anything. He was even thinking, as he raced out, "A fifty-four to seven licking must be a luxury, in ~~a~~ way. You don't have the pressure on you any more. Not like it is when you are still unbeaten, and you're saving your weapons for the tough ones—and they are all tough!"

In the line-up to receive, he said flatly, "Come on, gang, we got to get to work. Just because they intercepted one lateral doesn't mean we're licked. Heck, we aren't even warmed up yet."

Hisston got it again, and again hit up to the thirty. And Johnny couldn't find it in him to blame the man when, with a clean lateral offering itself to Scooter Clett, the big back clung grimly to the ball and went down on the thirty-three.

Working coolly despite the icy hand of fear that clutched at his heart and made his breath come shallow, Johnny directed his mates to three methodical, unflashy first downs up over the midfield stripe and into Rebel territory. But the inspired band of Southern Reserve men, who met each platoon movement of O'Mara's with grim eyes and taunting grins without so much as one substitution, stiffened. And then it was fourth down and less than a yard to go, on the Reserve thirty-eight.

"Close punt formation," Johnny said in the huddle.

At the grumble of several of the men, Johnny said it again, no louder, but flatter, more demandingly. "Close punt, give plenty protection, and cut the gripping! Hep!"

It was a nifty that Johnny angled outside on the Reserve seven.

The defensive eleven came in, and the Rebels worked the ball back upfield slowly, painfully, twice gambling on fourth down to hold the ball, and making it by inches that required the stick to be

brought in.

"Moxie, that's what," Joey Streeter admitted for them all there on the bench. All but Johnny, that is. "Boys, we got us a Tartar in this so-called lousy Reb team."

But a penalty for illegal use of the hands lost yardage, and an offside made it worse, and the Reb gamesters had to kick. Johnny and his mates came in to take over on their own fifteen.

Johnny saw the pattern of it clearly. It wasn't spectacular. It got booing and jeers from the stands, and glum, rebellious silence from his own mates. But he saw the pattern of The System and he played it as he saw it.

Straight bucks, reverses, off-tackle smashes, battering away at the game Rebels and shoving them slowly along in front of them. Then, a coffin-corner punt or a punt from the wide spread that made Johnny stand farther back, but assured no long runbacks with the ends down there fast under the high kicks. He used the latter now, and the Reserves took over deep in their own territory and faced the eleven defensive men of O'Mara's regiment of players.

Twice, Mestres broke loose for long, flashy gains, but with two safety men playing well back, and the defense tightening in the harder going, Southern Reserve surrendered on downs. Then it was Johnny & Company who went in and worked it back up to punt again and let the tide of Southern's inspiration break itself on O'Mara's platoons.

AT THE half, it was still 14-0, and Johnny walked away from a group that was anxious to be turned loose and making no bones about it.

"We stink, we look lousy," Hisston said. "Those guys are getting the cheers and we're getting the jeers."

Johnny found Jiggs and got him aside. "The boys don't like it," he said flatly.

The coach stared. "Well, do you?"

"We are going to win it. But I'm getting arguments in the huddle. And listen to them now!"

O'Mara said, with a shrug, "You know The System. You know what's ahead of us, too. North Central, undefeated for two years. Eastern, unbeaten by us for eight years. Rocky Mountain Tech, laying for us for what you did to them last year after the Eastern game was behind us. You know, too, it's sudden death if we slip."

Johnny went away with new determination, and with his face forbidding in its grimness.

Twice, in the third quarter, Johnny's mates looked at him in mute protest when he ordered kicks on third down. But Johnny ignored them, reminded himself of the games ahead, reminded himself of the nothing ahead if he and his teammates slipped once.

It was in the closing five minutes of the third quarter that Johnny nodded to the others in the huddle and said quietly, "Let's go. Time's a-honing, fellas."

He used the double reverse that flowered into a forward, and the State stands were up and roaring when Streeter hiked it to the ten. Hisston bludgeoned it over in two tries, and Johnny coolly added the point-after.

He was afraid it had been too late, his marshaling of State strength at the time he had ordered it, but Southern tried to play it safe and Corky Lovejoy, defensive-platoon halfback, threaded the punt back to the thirty, and State's attackers came back in and hammered away eagerly.

Johnny felt sorry for Cookie Mestres. Cookie had played high-school football for Sayreton High, Coltonville's arch rival, and he was at Southern Reserve when the Rebels didn't have much more than ambitions and gameness. But Johnny felt sorrier for what would become of Johnny Gerrard and his plans if Cookie's machinations and his inspired attack worked.

State worked that delayed buck by Hisston, a power play that was as bruising to the opponents as it was sure of yardage. The State line worked, the backs faked at the ends, and then Hisston

had the ball suddenly and was blasting through center and taking the secondaries with him for five and six yards at a clip.

Cookie was ridden over for the score, and he didn't come up again, and the stands on both sides stood and roared tribute to the little blond man's gameness when two of his mates walked him between them off the field.

Johnny shrugged away his regrets for his old rival and laced the point-after between the uprights to tie the score. The Rebels fumbled the following kick-off in their eagerness to work another score, as the fourth quarter opened, and it was Johnny himself who fell on the ball for the recovery on the Reserve nine.

Hisston blasted over in one smash, and the rout was on. Jiggs O'Mara emptied the bench in the 42-14 victory for State.

IN THE dressing room, Hisston said, "I feel like I killed a baby, or something. Oh, well, the only thing that shows in the record books is the score, isn't it?"

Streeter laughed. "Say, those guys looked like they were having fun, didn't they? Laughing and kidding us the whole time! I wonder how the game looked from the stands?"

"Let's get someone who is sucker enough to pay four-forty for a seat and ask him," Digger Ghormley, a defensive end, suggested.

Down the line, some voices were raised in joyous song, and Johnny looked. Tib Corday, Wacky Wojno, Gip Frantzer and some of the lesser subs who had romped in the fourth quarter were giving vent to their ebullient spirits.

It reminded Johnny of someone. Somewhere. Sometime. But because it was a long way back, he had to think a bit before he had it.

"Frosh year," he thought. "Or maybe when we won the regional high-school championship at Coltonville? I dunno."

He looked around and saw that the substitutes were the only ones making a whoop-te-doo. Brice, Hisston, Streeter, Keats and Dude, Sid Garst and Tub

Blaisdell—all the attack-regulars—were as sober as Jiggs O'Mara, and Jiggs O'Mara was as sober as a Supreme Court Justice considering a cut-and-dried case as he eyed Johnny.

"Those three delaying penalties," the coach said, plainly speaking what was on his mind. "The boys arguing your plays in the huddle again, Johnny?"

Johnny ducked his head and became busy with a shoe that was already laced. "Don't seem to remember," he hedged.

Jiggs nodded. "I've got an idea for curing that. And it has got to be cured! One of those penalties could tumble us down into ruin."

Johnny forgot everything else that had been crowding back into his mind from somewhere in the past. "Well, we'd better use it, whatever it is," he murmured. "For all the lop-sided scores of these two games, it's been tight—right down to the wire. If Western hadn't folded when it did, and if Cookie Mestres' gang had had another fifteen minutes of going in them, we could be two down already."

O'Mara shrugged his hands. "Cookie Mestres? Listen, boy, you can't spot an All-American, and Cookie is that if ever I saw one. Put him with a good strong team, an outfit that has a few platoons to spare, and would he be a boy to sing about." He added quickly, "Not that I'd trade him for you any day, Johnny. Well, this is two of them behind us. Eight more and we're in."

Johnny felt an unutterable weariness despite the tightness that was coming back over his heart and his brain.

He was facing the last mile of the Glory Road and it looked harder than ever, and it had been too hard the last two years. If he missed this time, he might not even get to finish at State. Not with the stadium-dormitory closed and the training table a thing of the past if they lost, as Jiggs O'Mara had promised him it would be if they didn't come through this time.

On the way back to State, it stuck in his craw that Cookie Mestres and his losers did seem to be having a whale of

a time of it while they were facing what they must have sensed was an irresistible force, ■ State's erudite doctor of football had coldly and methodically cut their strength out from under them.

And the way the stands had roared his praise, you'd think Cookie had been winning, not losing!

"People who go through life laughing end up without any seat in their pants," Johnny reminded himself. "Me, I can't afford it because I was practically born that way."

He was wondering what Jiggs O'Mara had cooked up for stopping the game-delays arguments that were creeping into the huddles of late, and how North Central was doing against Eastern? It had been Eastern 36 to 14, at the half, in a game that ■ still under way.

Johnny went back to the club car of the train to listen to the balance of the game. He was in time to hear Eastern run the score to 48-14 ■ the uneven game ground to an end.

Johnny went back to his seat again in a black mood of despond. The Eastern game ■ only two weeks away.

CHAPTER V

Cutting the Shackles

JIGGS O'MARA introduced a new huddle to the team on Monday after the Southern Reserve game. The grim-eyed coach positioned the line and the backs in two equal rows facing Johnny.

"Now, this will be the way of it," he said. "The huddle will always face toward our bench, and I'll always be watching. If one of you so much as opens his mouth when Johnny calls for a play, you will be yanked out of the game. If it happens again, you will be off the team. I've lost my last five yards for anything ■ stupid as arguing with my field-general."

Johnny ■ the shrewdness of it even

while he regretted it had to be done. A team that argues over plays is a team that has no leadership.

Jiggs didn't make it any better with Johnny's mates when he added, "Johnny didn't ask me to do this. It's my own idea. Okay, now, let's get the practice under way."

The attack formation devoted its time to running through the plays that were being polished to perfection for Eastern, while the defensive alignment worked on North Central plays, studying the gimmicks in them and figuring how to stop them.

Joey Streeter asked, with an effort for casualness, later, "Hey, Johnny, is it the same old grind against North Central? Just kick the padding out of them until they lie down and we roll?"

"We'll play it the way we find it," Johnny hedged. He was mildly annoyed that Streeter could ask such a dumb question. "And I hope we don't find it too tough."

"Oh, sure not," Joey nodded, his eyes mocking. "Wouldn't it be just too bad if it were an interesting game, or if the spectators got something in return for their dough and their cheers except a hard slab of concrete to sit on and a methodical murder to look at? Boy, what a calamity!"

Johnny finished dressing and went away.

He saw Bootsie Durhan outside of the Jogger Shop and the diminutive, pretty brunette flashed him a smile and disengaged herself from her companions when Johnny raised his eyebrows in mute question.

"What'll it be, coach?" the girl teased him, dimpling.

"Movies tonight, Boots?"

The girl stared quizzically. "Sure you can spare the time from your business, coach? Don't you have to work, or something?" Before Johnny could answer, she laughed and said, "Johnny, I have to work, darn it. 'Ye Sports Goods Shoppe,' where I slave, is taking inventory tonight."

"Oh," Johnny said. Then he added, "You talk as if I don't do any work at all. Remember, I'm part watchman, part bookkeeper for the stadium."

"Yes, I know, and it must lie heavy on your mind, having to make sure nobody steals the stadium. Or those permanent, non-movable lockers. Now, Ye Sports Goods Shoppe needs a bookkeeper and a watchman. You don't know anybody who wants the job, do you? I mean, somebody who has to work his way through? Mr. Beerman, our boss, says it is a cinch because the books can be balanced in an hour and all the watching a man would have to do would be to sleep on the back-room cot, where he could hear a break-in if one were attempted."

"Gee, I wouldn't know anybody who would need a job," Johnny said, and shook his head. "Unless one of the Alpha Zetas. They're mostly birds working their way through. I used to run with them when I was a frosh."

"Before you went into business," Boots nodded, her eyes serene when Johnny shot her a look. "I mean, into your job. The reason I asked, Johnny, is screamingly funny. Mr. Beerman, the old darling, suggested you. He's seen you with me a few times. He says nobody would dare break in if they knew you were inside. Also, he wants a watchman who can handle rough gents. There's not much money in it, but it does give a bed and some little cash and whatever you might want at the shop for cost."

"I'll ask around," Johnny promised vaguely. "Well, some other time, maybe, Bootsie? I'll wander over to the Alpha Zetas' house and see what's doing."

HE WAS sorry he had, later. The Alpha Zetas eyed Johnny in mute astonishment at first, and explained embarrassedly that they were having a "sing."

"Strictly rah-rah stuff, Johnny," Chub Galbreath laughed. "We are not of the dough, you know, nor big wheels that people want to entertain, so we have to fall back on prosy stuff like breeze ses-

sions, or song fests, or hikes down the road when the weather isn't so cold. When we are flush, we have weiner roasts and coffee. Hey, how do we look for Eastern? Good?"

Johnny hoped so. He hoped so devoutly. They *had* to win!

Galbreath shrugged. "Oh, we don't got to," he said. "I mean, it would be nice. But nobody is going crazy or broke if we drop it."

Johnny was laughing at the gag when he saw it wasn't a gag, that the man meant it. He was thinking about it when he started back to the stadium dorm.

"Funny how some guys have no college spirit," he thought.

The North Central game was a careful, Gerrard-made replica of those which had gone before, with North Central playing the big State squad all even through the first quarter and into the half.

Then they got the news when they hit the dressing room for the breather:

"Mestres is pacing Southern Reserve to a 20-7 lead over Eastern at half-time!"

Somebody yelled, "That lil' ol' Cookie Mestres is an All-American quarter for my vote!" It was Hisston. "Man, he's got it cinched if he can even do half to Eastern what he did to us."

"Eastern is saving their soup for us," O'Mara guessed. "But they'll salt this one away, you'll see. Not that I'm saying Cookie isn't all the quarterback any coach could want."

Scooter Clett shot a quick look at Johnny and put in, "Aw, what do you mean? Coastal swamped him, didn't they?"

"Cookie wasn't playing but one quarter," Streeter put in. "And he had us nailed down but good until he got hurt."

Johnny bit his lip until he felt the warm trickle of blood tanging his mouth. He went away to spit it out and to view his tumbled world where it had crashed about him without even a loss to mar the State record.

"My own gang and my own coach praising a quarterback who has his fun and laughs over it," he realized. "And

what do I get in return for years of playing The System, of doing the cold and factually right thing at the right time? What do I get?"

He didn't need to recite the facts. He knew them too well. No frat life. No real college life as he had thought it would be. The campus-sings, the gang around the frat-house fire of a cold night, singing, shooting the breeze. Like the Alpha Zetas the other night. He felt apart from them, left out of things. Lonely and alone.

Steaks instead of weiner roasts, sure. But eating them for business, eating them for free, eating them for the muscle and sinew and bone it would build for now and for later. Not for just joy.

Every move he had made for four years had been calculated to a definite and sure end—to be All-American quarterback, the field-general of an unbeaten State team.

He had given up normal companionship, friends, peace-of-mind, popularity, everything, in return for a measure of glory which had evaded him always like mist slipping away before the rays of the sun.

He had even tied his mother's comfort and happiness into the bargain he had made with fame, and it was a fame that was vanishing even before it had fully materialized.

Oh, sure, he had got a mention. Along with Cookie. On the third All-American team. Now he probably wouldn't even rate the third team, while Cookie—Cookie The Careless, Cookie The Joyous, Cookie The Popular, Cookie The Everything—was tops.

Even the fans in the stand must hate the name and the sight of Johnny Gerrard.

SOMEONE shouted into the door and Jiggs looked in at Johnny. "Hey, what's the matter? The mouth bleeding? Let Monk Murphey give it a look. We kick off this half, so you can come out a bit late. How did it happen?"

"I don't wonder you ask," Johnny said

dryly. "It sure wasn't in a ferocious tackle, nor carrying the ball, was it, coach? I'll be all right in a minute."

When Trainer Murphey came in and asked, "What's up, kid?" Johnny stared at the balding, squat man a long moment with unseeing eyes. Then he asked, "You got any change in your pocket, Monk? I got to make a phone call. Two of them, in fact. One is local, the other to home."

Monk had change. "Jiggs said there was something wrong with your mouth?"

"I hope not," Johnny murmured, "because I'm sure going to have to do a lot of talking in a little while."

After a good run-back of State's opening kickoff, North Central pushed the defensive alignment to the very shadows of the State goal posts before their ferocious drive faltered on a fourth-down.

The attack eleven hammered out, automatically starting to go into the tight punt formation that would let Johnny try for distance. Johnny yelped, "Signals!"

With the two lines of players facing him with hard, expressionless faces, Johnny said, "I was wondering how good we are on that new number Sixty-six. The fake punt setup?"

It was Hisston who breathed, "W-what? Look, this is no time for gags, Johnny. What's the play?"

"Jiggs is watching," Johnny murmured. "If he sees you arguing, he'll yank you. And you got a lot of work to do on this one, Barney."

Streeter was pale. "What if it misses fire?"

"Then I go out the nearest exit," Johnny said with a tight grin. "I sure'n Sam Hill won't go near our bench! I—darn it, there goes the whistle for delaying the game again."

North Central's rooters went mad when the officials grimly marched the ball back five yards to set it down on the one-yard line. Johnny met his mates' stares levelly. "Okay, now see what you've done? Who wants to play football, or are we going to stand here and compare notes all afternoon? Hep!"

The ball came to Johnny on a straight snap-back and he faked the kick beautifully, then dropped back to the very end limit of his end zone. The North Central tacklers were in and jumping for him when Johnny started for his right.

With the stands screaming at what they thought was a miscarry of a punt play, Johnny brought up to twirl and rifle a lateral back across the end zone to Streeter. Joey took it, raced back toward where Johnny was, and passed the ball off to Scooter as that back came by headed the other way.

Johnny got back there in time to take a tackler out with a roaring block as Scooter stopped, looked downfield and narrowed his gaze on the big burly man who was in back of the North Central safety man now, and still going all out.

The pass missed by three feet.

There was activity over on the State bench, but it was only to pick Coach Jiggs O'Mara up from where he had fallen on his face in stupefaction as he overbalanced to follow the play.

"Tough luck," Johnny murmured to his men, when they faced him in the huddle again. "We'll have to punt this time." He closed his left eye in a wink. "Sixty-six," he murmured. "Get the lead out of the satchel-pants this time, Barney."

Hisston moaned, but Captain-Tackle Garst laughed suddenly. Johnny snapped, "Hep!"

The direct pass came to Johnny nicely, and this time the North Central blockers were sure they had the kick blocked. Nobody living could pull one like that twice running. Nobody living outside of an institution for the insane, that is.

CHAPTER VI

On the Right Road

THE stands stood and roared salvo after salvo of amazement down on the field as the unbelievable game of

cops-and-robbers unfolded in the State end zone again. The faked kick, the faked run, the lateral, the reverse, the long, long pass that blossomed out of it as the State blockers followed their assignments and got up to do them over again.

Barney Hisston took the pass over his shoulder close to the fifty, and cut across to let some speedy State blockers get near him. The North Central safety, faster than Barney, caught up and threw his tackle. Barney threw his lateral. Keats Salmon took it, clutched it and raced on.

In the riotous roar of the State stands when the score went up, Streeter said casually to Johnny, "Well, that should have given the Eastern scouts lots of time to memorize that one."

"Yeah, I bet," Johnny said, almost absently. "Let's pass for this point, eh, Joey? On that new number Fifty-two, you to receive."

"Now I've heard everything," Joey breathed. "Listen, my old pal Johnny, are you sure you are all right?"

"That's the only thing I am sure of," Johnny grinned. "I mean that I'm *not* all right. Brother, I'm wrecked! I'm washed up, wrung out, beaten dry and stretched on the line. Jiggs' and Cyrus Colton's line. But they can't do anything to me until I come off the field, and I'm not coming off the field until the game is over. Me, I'm defensive quarter, too. For this half. Perhaps for the last time ever here at State that I'll be anything. Oh, well. Let's nail this point down, Joey."

They nailed it down. The defensive eleven came in to take over and Johnny waved the quarter and kicker back and made the kickoff, and he also had to make the tackle when the outraged North Central receiver bulled his way up through the middle like a berserk steer and broke into the open.

Johnny came up from the crashing contact with his brain spinning, but waved the relief quarterback away again. He ignored Jiggs O'Mara's imperious and furious gestures to come off the field

and winked at the inquiry of huge Clipper Swanson, the fullback who had been converted to defensive center.

"What gives?" Swanson asked. "You gone completely off your trolley?"

"Yeah," Johnny drawled. "Completely. I decided to play football for a change instead of just for a business. Also, I decided the customers maybe ought to get a look at some fun for their dough."

"I just hope you got something soft to land on," the big man shook his head.

"Three things," Johnny chuckled. "My pants, a cot in the back room of Mr. Beerman's Ye Sports Goods Shoppe, and a bed in a shack on Smoke Hill. I don't know where I'm going, fella, but it sure is interesting while I'm going. Come on, let's play some football."

The capacity crowd went slowly mad when the carefully hoarded plays State had built up for Eastern were unfolded, some into scores for State, some into scoring interceptions for North Central.

Johnny stayed on defense as well as on offense, and his attack mates were sober-faced when they came back in the first time. "Jiggs is crazy," Streeter warned Johnny. "Raving mad."

"Yeah?" Johnny brushed the information aside. He frowned at his mates in the two-line huddle. "Hey, what's the signal for the quarterback sneak—Thirty, right? Or is it Thirty-nine? Anyway, let's try that one, huh?"

Streeter laughed. Hisston guffawed. The huge linemen slapped their knees with hammy hands and laughed, and then laughed harder when the irate official moved the ball back five yards.

But Johnny made it all back when the play broke and the North Central defenders were stunned by the amazing sight of Johnny "The Doctor" Gerrard carrying. Actually carrying the ball! Johnny amazed them sixteen yards' worth until the outraged secondary flattened him with an earth-jarring tackle.

The next play disclosed a triple reverse-lateral that went for a score when the strong side pulled out and went over to screen the receiver in a goal parade.

With one minute to go the score was 55-27, State leading. The subs came pouring on and in another wave of them Johnny sprinted off to the deafening roars of the stands.

He sprinted right past Jiggs, past the bench and to the dressing room. He snared his clothes and sprinted with them over his arm to his dorm room. Nobody tried to stop him, either.

IN MONDAY before the Eastern game, Jiggs sent for Johnny to come to his house on fashionable East Broadway, at eight at night. Johnny sent back word he was working and would be around next morning at six when the janitor came, if the hour suited Coach O'Mara.

Twenty minutes later, Jiggs was staring truculently in the glass door of Ye Sports Goods Shoppe at the man and the girl who stared back at him inquiringly.

"Open up!" Jiggs roared. "Or have your clippings got your head so big you can't move without falling down?"

Johnny opened up. He pointed at Bootsie Durhan when Jiggs flashed the girl a look of hard inquiry. "Miss Durhan brought me my supper," Johnny explained. "And she is taking a bit of inventory while I do the books."

Jiggs said sourly, "Well, if any lipstick is missing, you ought to turn your face into make up for it. Where can we talk?"

Johnny nodded to Bootsie and led Jiggs into the interior, where he offered the coach a dainty chair in the millinery section. Jiggs broke the chair and remained standing when he had got off the floor.

"You know what you did, of course," he snapped. "You gave the game on Saturday to Eastern. On a silver platter."

"I dunno," Johnny shrugged. "It isn't so much the plays, it is who makes them and when they make them. The gang is right neat in carrying out its assignments, coach."

"Without any surprise," Jiggs demanded, "what does it get us?"

"An even break with the other mugs, maybe," Johnny conceded. "Mugs like Cookie Mestres, for instance."

"I knew it! I knew you were jealous of him, so you shot our bolt! That's what I told Colton."

"Yeah, I'm jealous," Johnny grinned. "Cookie is doing what I used to do a long time ago—making a game of football, and not only having fun for himself and his team, but giving the fans a run for their money. But that's all I was jealous of him for, and—well, I had a good game. I'm satisfied."

"You moved your mother back to Smoke Hill," Jiggs snapped. "How about that? Just to humor your vanity, or your dumb idea of fun, or whatever, you chuck away our untied-undefeated chances, move your mother to Smoke Hill, give up the training table and the decent dorm room you had, and flout my System. Our System—ah, The System."

Johnny cocked an eye at Jiggs O'Mara. "Listen, my mother lived in the neat cottage only when I was home. Did Colton tell you that, too? I didn't know it until I telephoned her to ask would she mind moving back to the old home. I should have known that, but I was too concerned with my own glory trail to think of anybody else's."

"Our untied-undefeated chances," Jiggs blustered, "gone!"

"I didn't read where we had conceded the game yet, coach."

"Your soft touch at the training table, and with a free room, a swell bed, and you toss it all up for—for this!"

"I've found out I sleep better on the bed I really work for, and Miss Durhan's cooking is nothing to turn down."

"My System," Jiggs shifted the subject. "Our System. How about that?"

"The System," Johnny grinned. "Well, it used to be to win games and to attract crowds to see your teams win them. I used to think your system and mine were the same. You still think so, I see."

"And?"

"And the more I have thought about it, the surer I am," Johnny said, and

laughed outright. "Coach, you didn't used to be this careful that you had everybody crazy for fear we'd drop one. If all players felt like that, there'd be no fun, no game, no lesson to learn from it. The lesson of taking your whipping today and coming back a better man tomorrow and dishing it out yourself."

Jiggs looked uncomfortable. "Still, The System is wrecked," he said. His eyes shot a look at Johnny, swiften away, and came back. "Don't you see that?"

"No," Johnny shook his head. "How?"

"Well, heck, any system needs a smart, heads-up, alert, game, gambling and popular quarterback, doesn't it? And I had one, didn't I?"

"Gee, coach!" Johnny swallowed. "You—you mean—"

Jiggs sighed. "I mean," he said, "I don't dare face the boys again, nor Colton either, without you are there with me, Johnny. I—well, I—aw, heck, do I have to beg you, Johnny?"

"Coach!" Johnny crowed. "You mean, win, lose or draw?"

"Those are my terms," Jiggs grinned. "Win, lose or draw, Johnny, we want you back. But you'll have to stop trying to break your neck on those blocks you took a liking to in the North Central game. I'll look for you tomorrow, Johnny."

THE Eastern stands rent the air with their screams of delight when Hisston bobbled the kickoff and had to fall on the ball on his own two. Roar upon roar they poured down on the heads of the huddling Statemen, ganged now in their old-time huddle of heads close and friendly arms locked.

Two quarterback sneaks to eke a wider margin for the punt were swarmed under with Johnny bruised and battered when he came up from under the second one. A smash at center by Hisston added only a yard more.

Johnny went back to kick formation, the line tight for distance rather than coverage of the run-back, since it was fourth down and seven. He stepped forward to boot, then leaped high to rifle a

short pass to Streeter down the middle on the fifteen. But it was broken up.

An official was in calling a clipping penalty on Eastern, however, and it was first and ten on the State seventeen. The State backers roared their glee, and while the echo of their cheers was still spilling around the huge stadium, Johnny called Sixty-six and the hipper-dipper fooled even the Eastern players who had studied the diagrams, and Hisston was slamming up over midfield, was stepping into Eastern territory, was buling his way out of the arms of tacklers, and going over carrying a last tackler with him.

Johnny booted the point-after in the welter of noise, and he didn't even realize he had made it until his mates were slamming him joyously on the back and giving way to the defense platoon.

Johnny Gerrard was thinking how funny glory was. It was like a football, bobbing and ducking and twisting away from you when you reached for it. Or maybe it was more like a road. Johnny Gerrard guessed it was more like that.

"Glory," he thought, as he looked at his mates who were making it for State that afternoon. "Glory is like a road, and the Glory Road is what you make it, not what it makes you. You don't even have to always win to travel it, so long as you lay on the line what you've got to lay on it."

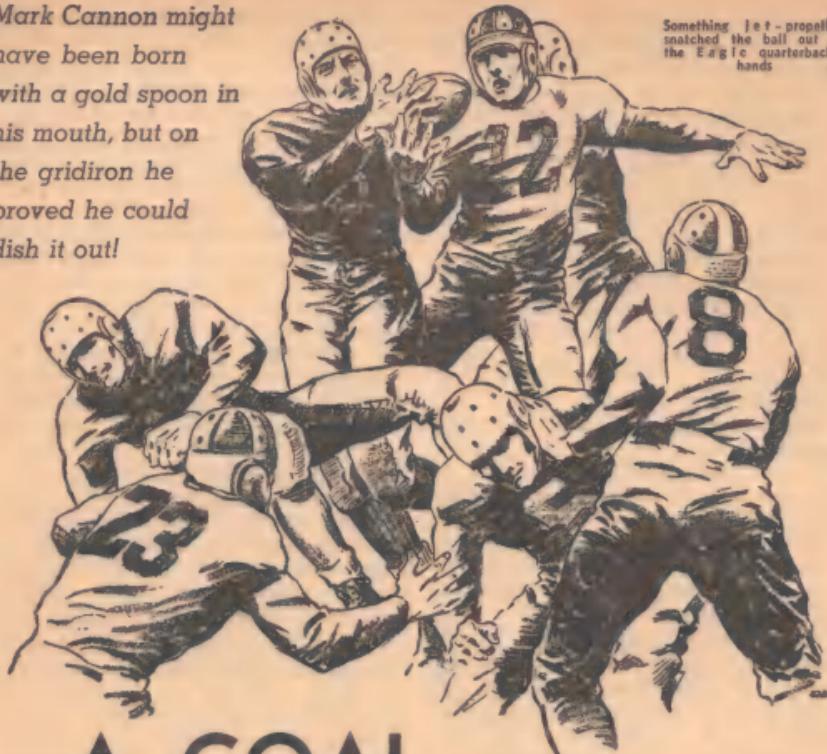
The sun was breaking through the light overcast to shine down on the State bench when Johnny Gerrard and his mates sat down. It might stay to shine on them, or it might not. Johnny didn't even give it a thought.

What counted was now, not later. What mattered was today's fight, not tomorrow's probable loss. Johnny sat very still in the hush of his great discovery, not realizing that countless Greats and near-Greats and not-at-all Greats had made that discovery as far back as football had been played, and would continue to make it as long as football was played.

For The Glory Road is composed of just such as these.

Mark Cannon might have been born with a gold spoon in his mouth, but on the gridiron he proved he could dish it out!

Something jet-propelled snatched the ball out of the Eagle quarterback's hands



A GOAL to GAIN

By HERBERT L. McNARY

MARK CANNON, slouched on the Bears' bench and lazily chewing a wad of gum, saw the Steelers' single-wing reverse go through the tackle slot again for a sizable gain and another first down. Well, Mark couldn't complain. The same play had gone through him when he had been out there.

A plane flew overhead. Mark cocked

an eye at it and nudged the player sitting next to him.

"Joe, is that a jet?" he asked.

A big guard wrinkled his brow. "Huh?" Then he scowled. "How should I know? Why don't you keep your mind on the game?"

The good-natured Cannon leaned forward. A grin sat easily on his strong, youthful features that suggested the

A GOAL TO GAIN

bony strength of granite. Even his closely-clipped hair looked like bleached moss clinging to rock.

The Bears' tackle got up and wobbled around. The Bears' coach also got up, looked at Cannon, hesitated, and then reluctantly jerked his thumb toward the field.

Mark didn't miss the hesitation. His smile spread and he said to himself, "Okay, I'll fool you. I'll be good. I'll stop that play!"

Cannon reported in, and then crouched on the line. He had the ideal build for a tackle—six-foot-four and two hundred and twenty pounds perfectly distributed so as to give him both power and speed. Yet the Steelers looked him over with disdain.

They came right back with the same reverse that had been gaining yardage for them and pointed for another touchdown. But this time Cannon exploded. He brushed aside the interference and smashed through to spill the ball carrier for a loss.

The Steelers elected to pass. Cannon slashed through. The passer faded, but as he turned to spot a receiver the vise-like arms of Mark Cannon pinned him. The Steelers had to kick then.

For the third time in succession, Cannon got into the Steelers' backfield. His outreaching right hand just tickled the ball and the punt traveled only twenty-five yards.

Cannon didn't fit into the Bears' offensive setup and so he came back to his position on the bench. Joe Gazzolli squinted through eyes that had been scar-tissued when Joe thought he could be a pugilist as well as a pro football player.

"What got into you all of a sudden?" he demanded.

"Why, didn't you know?" asked Mark. "I'm really good!"

Gazzolli made an uncomplimentary sound. Mark merely laughed.

BELOWEATH his good nature, Mark Cannon nursed an ache. He was

one of the Cannons—a member of a wealthy family that had made unfavorable headlines for years. And then, suddenly, there wasn't any more money. That was after Mark had been graduated from Hanover College and had gotten married. Thus when the Bears had offered him a contract to play pro football, he had snapped it up.

But Mark Cannon wasn't to be just an ordinary football player. He was a playboy—he couldn't be expected to extend himself. He would only go through the motions, but the publicity would be worth money to the club. So, in silent resentment, Mark had said to himself, "If that's the way they want it, that's the way they'll get it!" The season had just begun. He could change conditions later, he reasoned.

He sat forward on the bench again. Actually, his stopping of the Steelers' drive proved to be the turning point of the game. The Bears went on to score. Cannon went in again and after the kickoff hurried a play so that the Steelers fumbled. The Bears recovered and cashed in on a field goal.

In the closing minutes the Steelers took to the air, but the Bears intercepted one heave and made the count 36 to 21 to ice the game. No one told Mark so, but he felt he had played an important part in the victory.

The Bears had played away from home and so it was Monday evening before Mark had a chance to discuss the game with his wife. The trouble was, Doris had only a casual understanding of football. But as she sat across from him on the divan, knitting, she agreed with him, and it was a consolation to know that someone was on his side.

He liked to watch her deft fingers. Doris was dark and exceedingly pretty. She had played small parts in the theater, and before that had been an efficient secretary. But tonight there seemed to be something bothering her. When Mark had started to shut off the radio she had insisted that he leave it on. And then there was the matter of the tele-

phone. He had heard it ringing from the outside hall, but when he entered the apartment Doris had said she had been unable to reach the phone in time.

Mark brushed the matter aside, as he normally did with anything that perplexed him. He was listening half-heartedly to the radio when the announcement came:

"The Bears tonight announce the sale of Mark Cannon to the New York Bombers for cash."

The statement didn't register with Mark immediately. When it did, he came out of his chair as though leaping for a loose football.

"Did you hear that?" he said. "And after I practically won the game the other day for them!"

"Maybe," said Doris, "the sale had already been made."

"But to the Bombers, of all teams! Know who the coach is? Of course you do—I told you. It's Ed Powers. The same Ed Powers we virtually forced out of Hanover because he was a slave driver."

Her concentration on her knitting was in itself very expressive of her feeling.

"Now, Doris, don't you start saying that we were a bunch of snobs at Hanover," Mark said. "It's just that at Hanover they felt that football should not be overemphasized."

Doris laid down her knitting and folded her hands over a shapely knee. She said quietly, "Mark, perhaps my fling at show business prejudices me. But when a college—any college—seeks to fill its stadium week after week at four dollars or so a head, that college owes it to the public to give the best show possible."

"So I'm to understand that you want me to agree with the sale?"

"You must make that decision, Mark," Doris said calmly.

He frowned, thinking of Ed Powers. "You weren't so crazy about my playing pro football in the beginning."

"Not in the beginning," she agreed. "I knew you would get a bad press be-

cause of the escapades of the other Cannons—"

"But I've taken everything they dished out," he put in.

"That's right, you've stood up fine, Mark. But since this is your first job—well, I don't want you to quit."

So that was it—Doris didn't want him to quit. Well, he wouldn't quit.

CANNON went to New York to see Ed Powers, and was kept waiting. That hurt, because he knew the greeting he would get from Powers. Even Doris didn't understand. A man could get angry over insults and burn up. Or he could hide that anger under a grin and in his own way tell those booing, jeering, name-calling wolves to go to the devil.

"Playboy." "Snob." "Faker." And Ed Powers, coach of the Bombers, would be the worst of the lot. That guy could really blister you. Cannon winced as he waited in the outer office.

He stewed for a good ten minutes on the bench near the switchboard before the girl gave him the green light. Mark walked down a short corridor adorned with sports cartoons and entered the indicated office.

Powers sat behind a big desk. He was wearing glasses which he removed, disclosing a poker-faced expression. Mark matched it. Powers was a hefty man, with much of his weight concentrated at the chest and shoulders. Although not yet forty, he looked older, perhaps because of a shining bald pate with a monkish black hair line at the ears.

"I don't buy players," Powers said. "Sometimes I'm not even consulted. I just boss 'em. We don't like each other, do we, Cannon?"

"That," said Mark, emphatically, sitting forward in his chair, "we can agree on!"

"We can agree on something else," said the coach, "and kindly observe I don't pound the desk with my fist when I say it. I'm going to make or break you, Cannon!"

"I hardly expected any favors from you," Mark said, unperturbed. "Actually, you should feel grateful. Look what you got when Hanover bought up the last year of your contract. One year for nothing and double the amount to coach the Bombers."

Mark left the office then. As he told Doris later, "At least I got in the last word. Maybe that won't happen again all season."

"Then you are playing all season?"

"Listen, honey, I'll play that Simon Legree off his feet just for spite! And then when the right time comes, I'll—well, I'll do something."

None of the sports writers sang hallelujahs over the purchase of Mark Cannon. His final season with Hanover had won him no accolades. In the brief time he had been with the Bears he had shown nothing, obviously, or the Bears would not have sold him. The Bombers had bought him because, with Manskofsky side-lined, Cannon might fill the spot until the Bombers could do better.

But against the Steelers on the following Sunday afternoon, Cannon proved little short of terrific.

Powers didn't start Mark. Using a single wing and throwing plenty of beef against the left side of the Bombers' line, the Steelers staged the equivalent of a Marine invasion of a Pacific island. Powers sent in Mark when the Steelers threatened to build onto their 13-to-3 lead.

Chet Nagus, outstanding lineman crouched across from Mark, taunted him, "So they picked you up from the Bears. What did the Bombers do—lose a bet?"

Only the week before Mark, a Bear, had been pushed around by this same Nagus in the few brief moments he had faced the Steelers.

"You should be sitting on your rear when you talk to me," Mark said now.

He submarined and took Nagus on his shoulder. With a lift that was all part of the same motion, he picked up the Steeler lineman and threw him into

the ball carrier. The play was as effective as it was spectacular. The Steeler not only lost ground, he lost the ball. And Mark fell on the pumpkin.

With the change of players on the offensive, Mark started to leave, but Powers chased him back to the huddle. The play was called for the long side and Mark was on the weak side. Mark let his man through—not Nagus now—and tore down the field.

Girardi, luggering the ball for the Bombers, was the fastest man on the Bombers' squad. But Cannon was a good ten yards ahead of him and threw a terrific down-the-field block.

"Jeepers," demanded a sportswriter in the press box, "how did that guy get down there without being off side?"

GIRARDI raced for sixty yards before being finally shoveled outside. Naturally, the eyes of the howling spectators were focused on the elusive and speedy ball toter. The run set up a touchdown.

The game broke open right after that score, with some good passing shown by both teams, but what at the outset had promised to be a Steeler easy victory became a seesaw battle. Some one factor had brought about the change, and expert eyes looking for that factor found it in the smashing line play of the new tackle, Mark Cannon.

The Bombers won the game in the final minute on a long pass that made the count 52 to 47. Once again Mark Cannon threw a very important block to clear the path for the ball carrier.

Mark came out of the showers into the steaming locker room to find Ed Powers waiting for him. With his customary poker-faced expression, the coach said, "I've seen you flash like that before, Cannon. Trouble is, you don't keep it up."

Mark reached into his locker for his shirt, and there was a teasing smile in the blue eyes that looked at Powers.

"You should have saved that for next week, coach. No sense making me mad

now. It will wear off by next Sunday."

Powers' lips firmed. He put one foot on the bench and rested a forearm on his thigh.

"Let's understand each other, Cannon. I said I'd make or break you. Perhaps I should have said I'd take you apart and find out what makes you tick. I can do that here—while at Hanover I encountered opposition. I don't intend to use alleged psychology to make you mad or otherwise spur you on. Whether you've got something that can sustain itself, or are naturally a lazy bum, is locked up in there."

Powers jabbed a long finger just above the second button on Mark's shirt.

Later, when Mark got back to the hotel room he and Doris had taken until such time as she could locate an apartment, he wore a boyish expression of expecting a pat on the back.

"The Bombers won," Doris said. "I'm so glad for your sake, Mark."

His disappointment faded quickly. He knew that the average football spectator, far better versed in the game than Doris, had attention only for the man with the ball. He shook off his coat and tie and dropped on the bed.

"What did Powers have to say?" Doris asked, powdering her nose in front of the panel mirror. "Was he pleased?"

"He won the first round. He made a crack about my not being able to keep it up, and I said he should save it if he wanted to needle me."

Doris turned away from the mirror.

"But what did he say?"

"Gave ~~me~~ a sermon about trying to make a grown man mad was kid stuff and what made me tick was inside me. I'm still a lazy bum to Powers—or, in other words, a Cannon."

Doris picked up her compact. "It isn't your fault that you were teetthed on gold service, with mansions at Newport and Palm Beach and with cousins and uncles and aunts marrying princes and dukes and countesses. Grandpa Cannon just didn't go broke soon enough."

Mark rolled over on his side. "I can't

figure out what you've got against money," he said.

"Neither can I," said Doris, "because I like the nice things money can buy. But I do know that if Grandpa Cannon hadn't put you on your own, I would never have married you. Now, get your coat on so we can go down and eat."

Mark dropped back on the bed. "Have them send something up. It's no fun trying to convince people you're not a lazy bum."

* * * * *

Some of the sportswriters hinted that Mark Cannon's performance against the Steelers was just a flash in the pan, that there must be some flaw in Cannon or else the Bears would not have turned him loose.

But the reports that came back when they played the Packers stated that Cannon was pretty much the outstanding lineman of the game. The Bombers won, anyway.

Mark had faults. He needed the polish that any first-year man in the pro game has to acquire. He could be mouse-trapped. And the Eagles did mousetrap him the following Sunday, but Mark came back in the second half and, playing offensive tackle, performed some sensational down-the-field blocking.

"No tackle in the game today gets down the field any faster than Mark Cannon," wrote Dave Breton in the *Globe*.

If Powers read that comment he said nothing to Cannon about it. What he did say was, "Look, Cannon, you're a sucker for that mousetrap. It just shows you're not thinking, haven't got your mind on the game. Mental laziness is worse than physical laziness. We're going to pound those plays into you."

Mark put on an act that was only slightly exaggerated when he came back to the hotel after one practice session. Tongue out, he stumbled into the room and tottered over to the bed.

"Tired?" Doris laughed.

"There must be another word for it, honey," he groaned. "Powers is giving

me the works—and I mean the works!"

"Perhaps he is trying to correct some fault. Stage directors are like that, too."

"Listen, Doris," and Mark rolled over on an elbow, "Powers isn't kidding me. He's a sadist. You probably think I'm hypoed up on this Cannon fortune business. But when you're in the papers and magazines and newsreels for years you become public property. When that money suddenly evaporates there are people who take a fiendish delight in seeing you now as some kind of a crook that got the money dishonestly in the first place. I'm sure Powers belongs to that breed. He wants to make me cry uncle."

Doris said only, "Maybe you are right, dear."

Mark tried to weigh the words for their sincerity, but felt too tired to pursue the matter farther.

THE BOMBERS had a very important game against the Redskins on Sunday. Most of the pregame news centered on the passing duel the fans could look forward to, but in Wynn Davis the Redskins had a great tackle, almost to be mentioned in the same breath with the Eagles' noted "Chip" Harbash. One of the sportswriters advised the fans not to concentrate too much on the passing duel because they might miss an equally interesting duel between two outstanding linemen, Davis and Cannon.

Possibly this article more than anything else prompted Mark Cannon to give forth with one of his best days. He played Davis off his feet. With his speed and power, Cannon seemed to be in the Redskins' backfield most of the afternoon.

Cannon alternated with Manskofsky, who had recovered from his injury, but it was the opinion of most observers that the Bombers' star tackle of several years would have to give way to Cannon.

The Bombers won that game 35 to 23. They won on passes, speaking offensively. Actually they won because the

Redskins' passing attack had been contained. And Mark Cannon had played a principal part in stalling the air attack.

That game, with its two-way comparison with Wynn Davis of the Redskins and Manskofsky of his own team, really pushed Mark Cannon into the spotlight.

"The rookie of the year," some reporters called him. "The prize boner of the year," wrote other scribes in referring to the Bears' sale.

It wasn't often that a lineman, any one lineman, at least, could be singled out as the individual who might bring a championship to his team. But in going back over the Bombers' season it could be argued that the edge in several important games had been gained by the really terrific line play and open-field blocking of the young giant, Mark Cannon.

"Looks like you are married to a hero," Mark told Doris as he put aside another newspaper. "All we have to do is to beat the Eagles and we're in. And it turns out that we might be able to do it because I'm the surprise of the season. Proud of me?"

"You're proud of yourself, aren't you?" asked Doris.

Cannon slumped a bit lower in his chair and frowned. "That's the darned annoying part of it—I don't know whether I'm proud or not."

After another moment of thought, Mark suddenly shot a look at his wife. "Say, do you always have to answer a question with a question?"

"I didn't know that I did," Doris said, smiling softly. "Do I?"

Mark's feet came down on the floor, but not with anger. It was doubtful if he could ever get really angry.

"There you go again," he said, "asking a question. I'm going out for a walk."

Doris offered no comment. She realized that there were occasions when a man needed to commune with himself. Mark, however, wasn't much used to self-communing. Life had followed too easy and orderly a pattern for him.

Always, there had been servants or a check book available to handle his problems.

The Bombers had another important game with the Yanks the following Sunday. If they won, they were certain of top place in the Eastern half, and if they lost while the Eagles won, the Bombers would be certain of at least a tie and a playoff game the week following with the Eagles. But everyone expected the Bombers to beat the Yanks—except the Yanks.

The Yanks, getting away early in the season to a poor start, had nothing to gain from a victory over the Bombers. But a team relaxed and with nothing to gain can be dangerous. And on Sunday the Yanks upset the Bombers 28 to 20. But thousands of disappointed fans milling out of the Polo Grounds in the dusk of a chilling Sunday afternoon told themselves that the result of the game derived not so much from the fact that the Yanks had won as from the equally obvious fact that the Bombers had lost.

DORIS watched the game, and saw and heard Mark booed off the field.

She was waiting back at the hotel when he arrived. He entered slowly, his eyes searching hers for resentment, anger, disappointment, anything but what was there—indifference. A sudden hope filled him. Maybe something had happened—she had had a headache and hadn't gone to the game.

"Did you see the game?" he asked finally.

"I did," she said, putting aside a magazine. "And I thought you were pretty awful."

He sank on the edge of the bed and let out a deep breath.

"Awful? Why don't you speak English. I was terrible! I pulled a stinkeroo!"

She waited a moment, then said calmly, "Want to tell me about it?"

He looked at her eagerly. "If there is anything to tell. I just reverted to form. You know what happens to a balloon

when you stick a pin in it. I'm the balloon."

"And the pin?"

"That's me too." He spread hands that were large enough to fondle a football as another might an apple. "Look. Powers pulled a fast one. No, he wasn't using psychology on me, he wasn't making me mad. But in the very beginning, when I first joined the team, I said, 'So he's going to break me? Well, I'll fool him. I'll be good, just for spite'."

He looked at her, hoping that she was following him, but of this he couldn't be sure.

"Then it suddenly hit me today that I had been good just to spite Powers and that I was helping make him a big-shot," he went on. "That I had been played for a sucker. And right there is where the balloon blew up."

He looked pathetic as he all but pleaded with her. "Honest, honey, I didn't quit. I didn't lay down. I just went dead inside."

She didn't say anything, but just sat there thinking. Mark watched and remained silent as long as he could.

"You hate me, don't you?" he finally said.

She turned her dark eyes full on him. "Hate you? No, of course not. I'm not even disappointed. Actually, I'm glad."

"Glad?"

"Yes. If what you have been doing was just out of spite—well, I wouldn't want it that way."

He rubbed his square jaw reflectively, said, "Playing out of spite sounds kind of rough, honey. But anyway, I was playing in terms of showing Powers that he wasn't going to have any reason for canning me. Honest. I never expected to play as well as I did."

"What happens next?" asked Doris.

He shook his head. "I don't know. I haven't any idea how good I'll be now."

The football fans, their opinions reflected by the papers, appeared to have two schools of thought concerning Mark Cannon. One school held that his poor

performance against the Yanks merely reflected the off-day every player occasionally experiences.

The other school, claiming to have delved into Cannon's collegiate football history, insisted that the Yanks' game disclosed a reversion to form of a player who was naturally indifferent and unambitious, and who, through breeding and instinct, was more at home sipping tea in society drawing rooms than wallowing in cleat-churned mud of the football gridiron. Professional football, that is. The man just didn't belong with those who had to earn their bread and butter by the sweat of their brows.

In a way these scoffers were right, Cannon admitted to himself, and tried to explain it to Doris. He had been playing under false pretenses. He had pitted himself against Ed Powers. He realized that he had been unjust to himself to say he had played to spite Powers. Spite implied a bitterness that was entirely foreign to his good-natured and easy-going disposition. That was it—easy-going, a sense of humor. He had been having the laugh on Powers. Powers, who was going to break him, force him out of pro football.

And then the realization that he had been playing right into the coach's hands, winning games for him, had left Mark Cannon shaken.

Some of the sportswriters were saying that he would outplay Chip Harbush. Why, every college tackle looked up to Harbush as the last word in offensive and defensive play. Year after year he had been almost unanimous choice for all-professional tackle.

Mark was like someone who suddenly realizes that he has been walking on a narrow plank high above the street level. He was no longer able to take the same steps. His confidence was gone.

In practice before the Eagles game, Mark displayed the listlessness he had shown against the Yanks. Here was a chance for Powers to display psychology, to cajole, inspire, berate, insult or use whatever tactics were called for

in masterminding a squad of complex and temperamental natures. But Powers did nothing. He seemed to feel that there was nothing he could do.

The word soon got out that Manskofsky would start at left tackle for the Bombers, and that starting meant that he would play the major portion of the game. That there would be little or no comparison between Harbush and Cannon, because Mark Cannon would only be a substitute.

THE BOMBERS got ready for the big game with the usual dressing-room formalities. The odds favored the Eagles, and the Bombers were realistic enough to accept the odds as justified. However, these hulking men were professionals. They had been through the mill. Missing was most of the tension, excitement or even apprehension of a college game.

Clumping around in sandals, strapping scarred legs and bodies with yards of tape, climbing into harness, these young giants looked at ease. They wanted to win, they hoped to win, and they would play their darndest to win. If Mark Cannon couldn't be of much help to them, why that was just one of those things.

Mark got in uniform along with the others. He was fairly free of tape, except for a small piece across the bridge of his prominent nose and a right hand taped almost like a boxer's. He went up to Powers with a request.

"Coach, I'd like to start instead of Mossie."

"Mossie" was Manskofsky.

This was an unusual request to make, but Powers' expression concealed any reaction to it. His dark, penetrating eyes fixed on Mark. He asked simply and bluntly, "Why?"

Mark proved just as concise. "I don't want to play to show you what I can do. Or even my wife—but you wouldn't know about that. I simply want to show myself what I can do."

The coach's eyes continued to stare.

Not a muscle moved in his face for a good minute.

"I'll take a chance," he answered bluntly.

Powers turned away. He stopped at a nearby bench. "You've got that ankle taped too tight, Steve. Frank, Feroni no longer hits to his right. Someone wised him. He comes in straight. Remember that?"

Powers went from man to man. Cannon watched him. He thought, Powers is taking a chance, at that. He hates my guts. How does he know I won't double-cross him? How does he—or I—know I won't let him down?

Line play would be mighty important in this game.

The roar of a jammed Polo Grounds greeted the Bombers as they ran across the field to their bench. The Eagles received a hearty welcome also. Trains, busses and private cars had brought thousands over the road from Philly.

Cannon's presence out there in the starting lineup to receive created a buzzing in the stands and even more so in the press section. Harbash was in the Eagle line making ready to come down under the kick, and Mark had a sudden hunch Harbash would be looking for him.

"Anyone getting the ball watch me," Mark called back to his mates. "It might be interesting."

Sure enough, Mark saw Harbash coming for him. Mark pretended not to see. At the last instant he swung his hips aside, shouldered Harbash as he was aiming a block and sent the star Eagle tackle sprawling. More important, a lane was made through which the elusive Girardi sprinted to the forty-two for a fine runback.

Cannon went over to Harbash as the teams lined up again.

"Mr. Harbash," said Mark, his voice carrying, "I'm surprised at you. You made that runback possible."

"I'll take care of you, playboy!" Harbash growled.

"I'll be waiting," said Mark.

He and Harbash played opposing tackles, but such factors as balanced or unbalanced line or individual plays determined whether, properly, tackle joined with tackle. Of course, two linemen could vary assignments a bit to settle a personal dispute.

Mark and Harbash looked like a pair of bull moose. In the beginning, their individual battle was pretty much of a standoff. If anything, the veteran Harbash had the edge. But what was far more important, the Bombers were tearing holes in the other side of the line and moving over into Eagle territory.

Mark watched a between-plays argument by the Eagles. In his own huddle, Mark said, "Harbash is getting scolded for spending too much time on me. It's a good time to send a play through him."

On the play Mark gave an extra heave to his charge while Harbash was mentally relaxing. The combination ripped a big hole through which "Hunk" Sweetman drove. Mark went on ahead and cleaned a path with a terrific block.

Sweetman went twenty-five yards to the seventeen and received the plaudits of the cheering thousands. But in the stands, and especially in the press section, were eyes trained to note the preliminary details that make a long run possible.

One scribe gulped coffee and grunted, "Looks like Cannon is having one of his good days." Another said, "So far, for my money, he has the better of Harbash."

The long run paved the way for a Bomber touchdown and the first score of the game.

CANNON remained in the game, playing as strong defensively as he had on the offense. Harbash left the game first. A moment or two later Powers pulled Cannon.

Mark came off the field alone. The same fans who had booed him the week before now applauded vigorously. Mark grinned. That ought to be sweet music to Doris' ears.

A GOAL TO GAIN

50

The Eagles pushed over a tying touchdown at the turn of the quarter, aided by a long pass. Once again the game leveled off on even terms.

Backs on both teams did some nice ball luggering. The Bombers and Eagles matched each other on passes. But more and more the contest settled into a battle between two great lines, and as hard and rugged and brilliant as the line play was, the individual contest between the veteran Harbash and the freshman Mark Cannon was the most outstanding.

Both teams counted with a field goal. Both pushed over another touchdown, and both missed the conversion. So the half ended with the teams all even again at 16 to 16.

Tired players slumped in the Bombers' dressing room just as they did in the Eagles. Spotters came in with their reports and huddled with Powers, but there wasn't much that they could contribute.

The two teams were evenly matched. A break could tip the balance. Endurance was more likely to decide the verdict.

On the matter of endurance, Mark Cannon should have the edge over Harbash. The first half had been pretty much of a standoff between the two. Harbash had quickly smartened up after the opening minutes of play and he had proceeded to show his youthful rival a few tricks gained from experience.

Mark had given some personal thought to their battle while he had been resting. He realized that he must capitalize on his youth. On the first play of the second half, he went up to Harbash.

"Listen, old-timer," he warned, "I'm gonna play you off your feet."

Mark was convinced that Harbash was the key-man of the Eagles' play and it was up to him to get out of there. He hadn't picked an easy job for himself. In the snarling tangle of two rugged lines a lot of things can be pulled off underneath by men who know the tricks.

Mark took a beating, a legitimate beating that he asked for and got, but he also dished out the full force of his youth, power and speed. Halfway through the

third period the Eagles had to take time out while Harbash stretched out on the cold turf. He wasn't hurt, just played out. He finally had to limp off the field.

Mark came off a few plays later. The spring was missing from his step and his arms hung limply from his bulging shoulders. His ribs felt like so many aching teeth and his face looked as if he had peered into a hamburger machine to see how it operated. But as he took a proffered wet towel at the bench, he managed a grin.

"You ought to see the other guy!" he got out.

Harbash and Cannon saw less action as the second half unwound, but every-time Harbash went back in Mark did too. And Harbash always left the field first.

The Eagles broke the tie with a touchdown and the Bombers equalled that just as the final quarter started. But halfway through the fourth quarter Goggins, for the Eagles, arced a forty-foot field goal to put the Eagles out front 26 to 23.

The Bombers had to take to the air in a desperate effort to snatch victory out of defeat, while the Eagles sought to freeze the score by using up time with simple running plays. The tired Cannon watched most of this play from the bench. Suddenly he saw something. He went to Powers.

"Coach, send me back," he begged. "And let me do it my way."

Powers looked and nodded. "Okay."

MARK started running up and down the side line, displaying the high knee action of a substitute going in for his letter. He displayed an energy his aching bones did not share. And when he went into the game he ran.

The Eagle coach sent the weary Harbash back in, which was what Mark wanted. They crouched across from each other.

"Here's where I wash you up—and for good!" Mark said.

They locked hard while a handoff play sent an Eagle back through the

other side for four yards. Again they clashed and again the Eagles gained, for first down this time.

A third time Cannon crashed Harbash, but on the fourth play Mark didn't retaliate. He feinted and then shot into the backfield.

The Eagle quarterback was handing off the ball when something jet-propelled snatched the ball out of his hands. Cannon tucked the ball under his arms and took off. Seconds passed before a stunned mass of spectators, and Eagles, realized the ball had been stolen.

Three periods earlier Mark would have matched speed with any man on the Eagles' team. But now he was leg-weary and the Eagles had fresh and rested players in to take up the chase.

Chase they did, a whole teamful, with Mark Cannon racing for the distant goal. He was thinking this was more than a goal that meant a victory and a championship. It was a goal he had set for himself. He had to prove himself.

White stripes passed beneath his aching feet. Above the roar of the crowd he could hear the hoarse breath of his pursuers. Someone hit him at the ten, but he was big and powerful enough to withstand the shock.

Mark Cannon stumbled over the goal line and smiled contentedly as he fondled the ball for the winning score.

Mark expected, a bit later, to find Doris, mink-coated and pretty as a picture, waiting alone when he came out of the players' quarters. Thus he was surprised to find her with Ed Powers.

"So you two have met," Mark said, coming up to them. Adhesive tape all but covered his nose and chin and his

right eye was closing, but he managed a smile. He added, "Maybe that's the way it should be, because I've got something to say to both of you."

He jabbed a finger into Powers' chest. "I didn't play that game for you." He pointed at his wife. "And I didn't play it for you, honey. I played that one for myself!"

They didn't look surprised. Finally Doris said, "I'm glad," and her eyes suddenly glistened.

"Mark," Powers said quickly, "I quibbled with you when I said I didn't buy players. I arranged to have you bought—at the suggestion of your wife."

Doris was really smiling through tears now. She said, "I wanted one Cannon marriage to stick, you big baboon! From what you told me about him, I figured Mr. Powers was the man to finish what he had started."

Mark shook his head. "I might have figured that play. No surprise when I was sold. Telephone ringing the night of the sale." He turned to Powers, the infectious grin stretching the ribbons of tape. "Guess I owe you an apology for things I said and thought, coach."

"There was only one thing you said that hurt," Powers said. "About my being grateful because I was getting twice what Hanover paid me to coach a pro team. I'm planning to go back to college coaching. A man has a better chance to mold character at that age."

He turned and walked away. Mark looked after him.

"A right guy," he said. "I had him wrong."

Doris smiled up at him. "Two right guys! And I didn't have you wrong!"

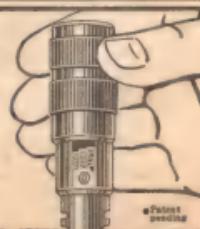
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THRILLS IN FOOTBALL

Exciting Highlights of the Gridiron

By JACK KOFOED

Famous Sports Commentator

LADY LUCK PULLS THE YEAR'S GREATEST UPSETS!

WHICH was the unluckiest team of 1949?

The University of Pennsylvania. It may not go down in history as one of the great squads to represent the Quaker City institution, but it had the worst breaks.

Against Pittsburgh the Quakers were strong favorites, figured to win by anywhere from seven to ten points. No eleven is at its best week after week, and that cloudy October afternoon the Red and Blue could not hit its stride. However, with only six minutes to go in the last quarter Penn seemed a certain one point winner.

Then, slippery, fast footed Lou Cecconi took a punt on the dead run, and raced fifty yards to Penn's 29. With time running out inexorably, the Panthers smashed to a first down on the eight yard stripe. Two hammer strokes at the line moved the ball to the five.

Fans rose and shrieked in excitement, but they had seen nothing yet. DePasqua faded, coolly measuring the situation, while frantic Penn linesmen ripped their way toward him. He tossed the ball to Sumpter in the end zone, and the yelling rose to a crescendo as it seemed Pitt had snatched victory from defeat at the last moment. But, there was a handkerchief on the field. Pittsburgh had been offside, and the ball was moved back to the 10.

Now came one of the great and courageous stands of the season. On third down DePasqua ripped off five, and

lateralled to Sumpter, who picked up four more yards before being tackled.

Fourth down. One to go. It wasn't much to pick up at that moment, and with the Panthers in full victory stride, there seemed every chance that they would make it. DePasqua hit the line with every bit of strength and power in



him. The defensive wall buckled for a moment . . . held . . . and the back was stopped without gaining the little bit of territory he wanted so much.

Penn's ball now, and only fifty-nine seconds left of the game. It was smart to stall and waste as much time as possible. Ray Dooney took the ball for an ordinary line buck, but was almost trapped in the end zone. He barely made it to the one. The Penn backfield had been in motion, and the team was set back to within half a yard of pay dirt.

Don't take chances now. Get that ball up toward midfield. Though the seconds seemed to move on leaden feet, they were moving, and there weren't many left. Dooney retreated deep in the end zone to punt.

This was the play of the game. The big moment. Conditions had changed so quickly in the past few minutes that anything seemed reasonable. The ball sailed back. The Pitt forwards charged. High into the air went veteran linesman Bernard Barkouskie in a desperate effort to block that kick. The pigskin hit him in the chest, and bounced into the end zone for an automatic safety. It gave the men from Western Pennsylvania one of the most thrilling and unexpected victories ever recorded by the slim margin of 22-21.

Two weeks later Penn faced the tremendous, victorious Army eleven. This time they were conceded no chance at

all. The only thing they could hope was to keep the score to a reasonable level. Expected to lose by at least three touchdowns, the Red and Blue not only bottled up Army's All America quarterback, Arnold Galiffa, but scored first on a 78-yard drive.

Coach Munger called on Herb Agocs to kick the point. The big end did not come close with his try, but at the moment it did not seem particularly important. Through the rest of the game Agocs was a tower of strength on defense, tackling with thundering fury . . . but in his own mind, when the game was over, he was the goat.

Army kept its winning streak intact by a slim 14-13 margin . . . the point Herb missed in his try after touchdown. Two defeats such as Pitt and Army inflicted upon them certainly rate the University of Pennsylvania team as the hard luck one of the year.

JIM HAGUE GETS A CHANCE AT ROSE BOWL GLORY

KEPPING to the luck theme, let's have a look at end Jim Hague, of Ohio State. A fine wingman and a good kicker, Hague, when he looks back on



1949 in future years, must admit that he did not exactly get the worst of it.

Ohio State faced Michigan on a chill, drizzle Saturday late in November. The Wolverines, Rose Bowl winners, could not, under the rules, return to Pasadena. If State at least tied Michigan, it would have that honor, so this was a game they could not afford to lose.

Well, for awhile, it looked as though they would lose it. For three hard quar-

ters they were outplayed, not by a great margin, perhaps, but enough to see Michigan hang onto a 7-0 lead.

Then the fireworks exploded. The Buckeyes had the ball on their own 20. Two running plays by Morrison and Krall took it to the 47. Then, Pandel Savic threw a pass to Ray Hamilton, who cut into the clear, and did not stop running until nudged out of bounds only four yards from pay dirt. The Wolverines did their best, but could not stop the aroused men from Ohio, who smashed across.

Now, the big job was up to Hague. If he converted the point it would tie the contest, give Ohio State the co-championship of the Big Ten, and make them a cinch to go to the Rose Bowl. Hague faced that task with full knowledge of the responsibility resting on his shoulders.

Jim is a calm fellow, with considerable poise, but there must have been a nervous flutter inside of him as he stood behind the line of scrimmage, with 97,000 breathless people watching his every move. He kicked, and the instant his toe dug into inflated leather his heart went sick with disappointment. He had

missed . . . missed the most important try for point he had ever attempted. Hague turned away, his face as dark as the weeping sky.

That's where old Lady Luck took a hand. The Michigan line had been off-side . . . and Jim was to have another



chance. Now that he had been given an unexpected lease on life he was not going to fail again. Of that he was sure . . .

and he did not. The ball went straight and true between the uprights, and Ohio State had the Rose Bowl game in its grasp.

Something more than five weeks later the Buckeyes faced California in the big game of the year. They were underdogs against the best team the Pacific Coast had fielded in some time. It was another tough, bruising game, with little to choose between the rivals.

With one minute and 55 seconds to go, and the score tied at 14-14, the Buckeyes were stopped in their tracks on the 10 yard stripe. They had the choice of gambling on a forward pass, or an attempted field goal, and chose the latter.

Again the issue was up to Jim Hague. He had given his school . . . with an assist from Lady Luck . . . the opportunity of playing in the Rose Bowl. Now he had the chance to give them a victory not many people had considered likely.

State lined up on the 10. Dick Widdoes, who was to hold, knelt and marked his spot carefully on the 17½. Again that breathless hush. Again a moment when time seemed to stand still. Back came the ball. Widdoes set it down. Hague kicked, and it sailed straight and true for the field goal that gave Ohio State its triumph.

Jim Hague is a fine football player, a gamester and a nice boy, but he must be rated as pretty lucky. If an over-anxious Michigan linesman had held back just the fraction of a second and the off-side had not been called, Jim Hague would not have had the chance to become the hero of the Rose Bowl.

ONE OF THE GRIDIRON'S WEIRDEST EXHIBITIONS!

TALKING about kicking, Jack Mackmull, of Army, rated as one of the best in college football for several years. He was practically automatic when it came to converting points after touchdown. Yet, in Army's rout of Fordham Jack needed five tries before getting a single point.

It was probably the wierdest exhibition ever seen on any gridiron. The soldiers rammed over a touchdown. Mack-

mull came off the bench, and booted the ball between the uprights with his usual calm. It didn't count, because Army was penalized 15 yards.

This time Jack kicked straight and true from the 23, but again his side was penalized. From the 39 he missed by a hairsbreadth, but this time Fordham was set back. Slightly bored by all the dither, Mackmull tried once more, missed again, and again it didn't count because

of a Ram foul. Finally, on the fifth attempt, and with the ball on the 11 yard mark, Mackmull converted.

There may be a match for this marr-house affair in the records somewhere, but I have been unable to locate it.

WHEN DUQUESNE'S PASSER WORE—A GEORGIA UNIFORM

GEORGIA had a bad year in 1949. As a matter of fact, when the Bulldogs faced Duquesne late in November, they had lost five straight games. Off the



record of strength in running and passing, Georgia would barely have squeaked through. They scored six touchdowns, but only one came as a result of their own offense.

John Lahosky was the Duquesne quarterback, and he had one of those afternoons he must have imagined could come only in nightmares. John was regarded as a pretty fair aerialist . . . no Doak Walker, Arnold Galiffa or Bob Williams, but more than adequate.

The first time he faded back, searching for a receiver, while the line fought to hold the Georgia forwards and give him an opportunity to get the ball away, he was confident. He lanced the ball at the target, but a Bulldog leaped into the air, snuggled it to his chest and ran for a touchdown.

That could happen to anybody, for the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley, as the poet said. Next time John threw the same thing happened, on each

occasion the Georgian who intercepted going all the way for a touchdown.

Lahosky was an unhappy young man. He had good competitive spirit. He kept trying, but one's confidence suffers in the face of such breaks as these. Still, he was the best man Duquesne had at the post, so there was no use benching him.

John kept throwing, because his team was well behind by this time, and the breaks kept going against him. Another pass was flagged down by the opposition. This time the Georgian who messed up the play for Lahosky didn't score a touchdown, but was nailed only a short distance from pay dirt. The tally was registered after a couple more plays.

The Duquesne quarterback was probably the most frustrated young man in America by that time. He must have felt the hot flush of shame on his cheeks, but there was no place to hide his head. He had to stay out there and keep pitching. I hate to tell you, but before the game was over John had another pass intercepted . . . and again the Georgian raced all the way into pay dirt.

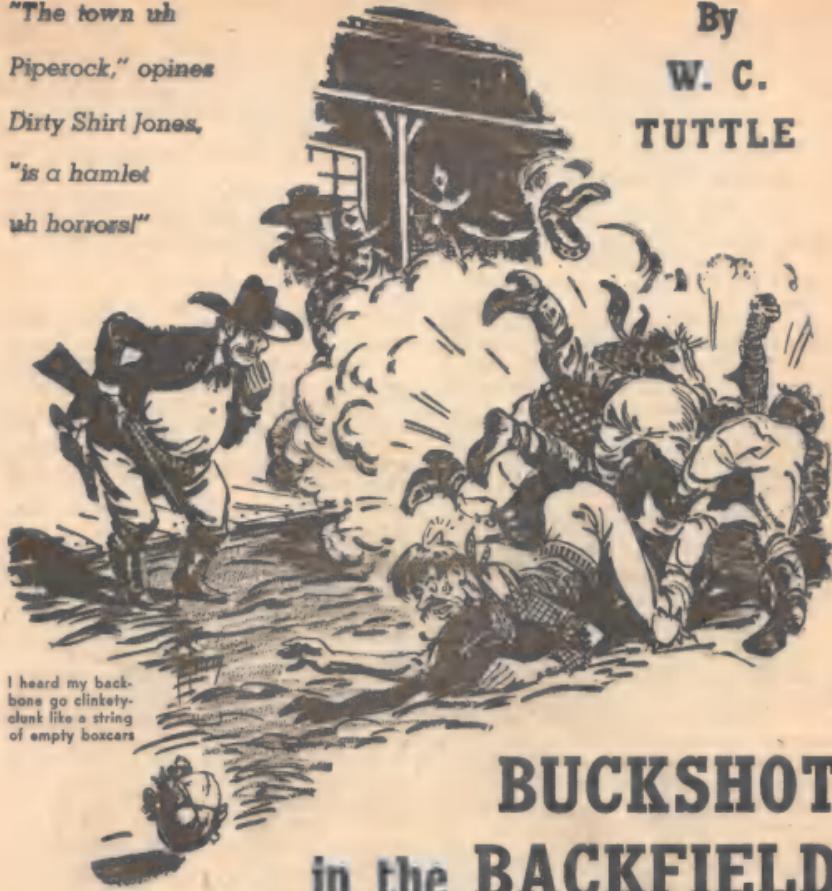


Lahosky was the best passer Georgia had all season, even though he wore a Duquesne uniform. This isn't said to humiliate the youngster. He did his best,

(Concluded on page 129)

"The town uh
Piperock," opines
Dirty Shirt Jones,
"is a hamlet
uh horrors!"

By
W. C.
TUTTLE



I heard my back-bone go clinkety-clunk like a string of empty boxcars

BUCKSHOT in the BACKFIELD

DIRTY SHIRT JONES says to me,
"Ike, the longer I live away from
Piperock the more I miss the touch of
its gentle influence. Good ol' Piperock,
carefree, big-hearted, welcomin' the
weary traveler. . . ."

"What do yuh reckon they distilled
into that last drink you had? Care-free,
big-hearted!" I interrupt.

Dirty Shirt looks at me, a pained ex-
pression in his right eye. Yuh see, his

left eye ain't noways fixed on its orbit,
but wanders from corner to corner, ■■■
yuh might say. Dirty ain't exactly cross-
eyed; he's only fifty-percent loose in his
vision.

He says, "Ye-a-a-ah, that's right, Ike.
Huh! I wonder what's goin' on in that
village of vice these days."

"Personally," I tell him, "I enjoy bein'
absent. Piperock has offered me up as
■■■ burnt offerin' too many times. Yuh

can't never tell what they've got on their alleged minds."

"I hanker for home," sighs Dirty Shirt. "Let's me and you imbibe of another hooker of this absent-minded mixture, put the pack on Annabel, and head for home. I suppose somebody in Pipe-rock keeps a light burnin' in a winder for us."

"Yeah," says I, "and they're a-settin' behind it, with a riot-gun across their lap. Home ain't tuggin' at my heart-strings, but I'll take my life in my hands, if you really hones for home."

Home. That word puts a catch in my voice. I squint through my liquor at the light. Ol' Piperock. Magpie Simpkins, Testament Tilton, Ricky Henderson, Muley Bowler—all that gang of semi-retired horse-thieves. Wonderful folks. They've changed their names so many times that nothin' short of a biologist could ever figure out their family tree. I'm several notches higher than they are. My ancestors didn't come over in the Mayflower—they was here, teachin' the Apaches how to make baskets to sell to the tourists.

When my great-great-grandfather heard about the Mayflower, he said, "Ten thousand people on one boat?" Somebody told him it was true; so he headed on west. Couldn't stand crowds.

Like I intimated before, Piperock ain't exactly a place to be proud of, but in comparison to Paradise and Yellow Horse—yuh can't compare. No respectable horse-thief will live in either of them two towns. No culture. Oh, they're civilized to the extent that they walk on their hind legs, but that's all. Why, Old Testament Tilton, with all his piety, gave up on 'em. He says, "For lo these many years, I have tried to snatch their brands from the burnin', and all I ever got was soot."

WELL, to make a sad story shorter, me and Dirty Shirt Jones packed up our burro and headed back for Pipe-rock. Dirty Shirt has got the lights of home in his right eye and hanker in his heart. Me, Ike Harper, I've got my misgivin's and a loaded gun. I may be soft-hearted, but I never get silly. I've lived by one motto—it's better to be a live coward than a dead hero.

We're only about five miles from Pipe-

rock, follerin' a trail past the one-room domicile of one Polecat Perkins when we both stop and consider humanity. There's Polecat and Dug-Out Dulin out in the yard, racin' each other, and about fifty feet apart.

Dirty says, "Oh-oh, what's goin' on here?"

Polecat's got what looks like a piller in his hands. He yells, "Seven! Sixteen! Thirty-six!" and then he starts runnin' ahead.

Dug-Out Dulin starts gallopin' straight for Polecat, and before I can shoot either one, to save the other, they mingles, head on. The crash was heartbreakin', not to mention boffes. They not only fall apart, but twenty feet apart. When me and Dirty Shirt get to 'em, they're both cold enough to skate on. We look 'em over and Dirty Shirt says, "Double suicide, Ike." I didn't say, but I felt it was.

We propped 'em up on Polecat's rickety porch, hoped that coyotes would leave 'em alone until they could be interred, and went on. I've allus thought that Polecat and Dug-Out was friends, instead of deadly enemies thataway. Dirty Shirt's right eye leaked a little, 'cause he was fond of both of 'em.

We're almost to town, when Dirty Shirt grabs me by the arm, and we stop short. In the middle of the road, not more'n fifty yards away, is Tombstone Todd. Tombstone is almost seven feet high, and seven inches through the middle. He's facin' away from us, so we can't see his expression, and in the road is somethin' kinda bundled up, mebby like an old shirt or somethin'. Tombstone lifts his left hand as high as he can, like he's salutin' the dawn, which is six, seven hours past, whistles as loud as he can, and goes gallopin' toward that bundle in the road.

This whole thing is amazin', to say the least. Tombstone is gallopin' like a spavin-legged bronc, and all to once he makes a kick at that object in the road. It was a beautiful kick. In fact, Tombstone put his whole soul into that kick; kicked himself upside down, and came down on that hard road square on the back of his neck.

Me and Dirty went down and looked at him. Dirty says, "He's as stiff as though a Eskimo had hit him over the

head with the North Pole." That thing he kicked at was an old pair of overalls, all tied up in a piece of buckskin.

Me and Dirty look at each other, kinda amazed. Then we drag Tombstone off the road, and put the bundle on his chest, and go on. Dirty says, "The only solution to this is that Buck Masterson has got a new brand of liquor, and Pipe-rock can't stand the change."

I dunno about that. Buck's regular whiskey is triple-distilled locoweed, spiked with sulphuric-acid and colored with creosote. There ain't been a tonsil in the town for years. It seems to me that any change he could make in his liquor would be puny.

I says, "Dirty, as a measure of precaution, maybe we better go to Magpie Simpkins' shack first. If he's kickin' or buttin', we can turn around and head for open country again. No riskin' life and limb."

WE find Magpie settin' on his little porch, along with Telescope Toliver. They're both six feet, six inches high, and both as thin as a whisper for help. Magpie's got a weary-lookin' mustache, sad eyes and big feet. He says, "So the Prodigal Sons came back!"

Telescope gets up. That is he erects his legs, but the rest of him looks like the letter S. He says, "I'll come back for more lessons, Magpie." Magpie says, "You're almost letter-perfect, Telescope."

I says, "What's wrong with you, Telescope?" and he says, "Ike, I'm a half-back."

"You're a half-wit, if I ever seen one," declared Dirty Shirt.

Telescope, creakin' like a rusty hinge, goes away slowly. Magpie looks us over carefully and says, "We hoped you'd come back. Piperock needs you two."

I says, "If our eyesights ain't playin' pranks on us, I'd say that Piperock needs several doctors and a few undertakers."

"That," declares Magpie, "is due to ignorance on yore part."

"If ignorance caused murder, they'd hang every man in Yaller Rock county," declared Dirty Shirt. "What's gone wrong with folks?"

"Wrong?" asked Magpie. "A mere figment of the imagination. Shakespeare says that nothin' ain't right nor wrong, but thinkin' makes it so. Yore trouble

is ignorance. For years we've lived in the shadder of ignorance. Some can't read, some can't spell. Ike, how much is two and two?"

I says, "I ~~mean~~ what yuh mean, Magpie—you shore need learnin'."

"Yuh put down the six and carry the one," says Dirty Shirt.

"I can tell yuh this much, gentlemen," declared Magpie. "When we git through, Piperock will be the seat of learnin' and culture. We're sheddin' the scales of ignorance from our eyes, and comin' into the sunlight of intelligence. No more shall the war cry sever, nor—"

I said, "Stop that right there! I've heard that chant before; and it ended up in me bein' almost crippled for life. What we want to know is this, Magpie: what's wrong around here? We seen Dug-Out Dulin and Polecat Perkins run into each other, and go out like busted lanterns. Then we seen Telescope Toliver aim a kick at a old shirt and almost die in midair. Has everybody gone loco?"

"Yore ignorance is showin', Ike," says Magpie. "We're takin' our first steps toward higher eddication."

I says to Dirty Shirt, "If yuh can't keep yore hand away from that gun—set on yore hand."

He says, "Ike, I'm a gettin' irked. And when I git irked—"

"It's simple," says Magpie.

"They seem to be," nods Dirty Shirt. "Go ahead with the alibi."

"We've got opposition, but she's puny," says Magpie, a faraway look in his sad eyes. "Paradise opposes us. They'll call theirs P.U. Ours is U.P. In a way, I'm glad, 'cause they need eddication worse than we do here in Piperock. I'd extend m' hand in friendship—but they'd bite it. We've got to learn 'em."

Maybe I ain't very bright. Maybe I jump at conclusions. But if Magpie ain't crazy as a shepherd—it must be me.

"Peeyou," says Dirty Shirt. "Yeah, that sounds like Paradise. But where do yuh git the Youpee for Piperock?"

"That means University of Piperock. The P.U. is for Paradise University."

Me and Dirty thinks this thing over, and Dirty says, "I knowed a feller who went to a university. He was smart."

"What'd he do for a livin'?" ~~says~~ Magpie.

"Hherded sheep. But what has a university got to do with all this murder and mayhem? Has the thoughts of brains made 'em go crazy?"

"They ain't thinkin' about brains, Ike," says Magpie, "they're thinkin' about football. What you fellers seen was the practicin' of Piperock's first varsity."

"If yuh don't mind, Mr. Simpkins," said Dirty Shirt, "I'd like mine in plain English."

"Well, Mr. Jones," replied Magpie, "those men you seen practicin', have all enrolled in the University of Piperock. It was my idea, and she's spread like wildfire. Paradise heard about it, and they're copyin' us. They ain't had an idea of their own since the Petterfied Forest started to harden. But we don't care. You watch Piperock."

"We will," nods Dirty Shirt, "and we'll watch her close, Magpie. But what's yore part in this deal—outside of the main idea?"

"I'll be known as the Father of Piperock, head of the University, and coach of the football team. I'll have yore applications made out t'day and you can take yore examinations tomorrow. If you can pass 'em—all it'll cost yuh is twenty-five dollars to join up. Don't shake yore heads. U.P. needs yuh—and she'll git yuh."

Me and Dirty Shirt don't say nothing, because we both hate arguments. We go up to Buck's saloon, seekin' information. We don't get scared easy, but when we do we like to be prepared for fast travellin'.

BUCK is behind his bar, favorin' a sore arm, skinned nose and a couple missin' front teeth. Kinda lollin' in a chair is Bulletproof Benson, a silly stare on his face, along with numerous bumps. I note one large, aig-shaped hump, which I don't believe nature ever passed on to any man. I says to Buck, "What's aillin' Bulletproof?"

Buck says, "Plumb, downright ignorance, Ike. He got his signals mixed."

Dirty Shirt leans on the bar and shakes his head. He says, "Gosh, what next?"

"The next," states Buck, "is the T formation. We've been a-usin' the single-wing."

"What," I asks husky-like, "are you aimin' to learn in college?"

"I am," replies Buck, "takin' a whirl at calculus."

Dirty's loose eye does a half-dozen loops, ends up in the northeast corner of section thirteen, and stands there kinda transfixed. I know what's on his mind, so I grabs his gun hand and shakes it. In that way he can't homicide poor old Buck, who says, solemn-like:

"I'm the tail-back."

Buck puts out the glasses and the bottle, sighs a little and says, "Testament says we must die for good old U.P. I almost did yesterday. Me and Dug-Out Dulin met head on, and I got knocked back so far that I remembered where I hid a bottle of moonshine back in nineteen-two, when Piperock went local-option."

Dirty Shirt took three swallows out of the bottle before he filled his glass. He needed it. I've got more restraint than Dirty has, and at least one-tenth less thirst. We stood there and absorbed at least a quart apiece of Buck's Magic Mucilage, when in comes Wick Smith, who runs the general store. Wick is almost seven feet tall, fashioned after a length of two-by-four scantlin', and has a mustache long enough to use for front suspenders. Just now he looks like a partly-animated ad for some kind of kidney pills.

The only thing husky about Wick is his voice. Buck says that Wick is takin' up a very scientific study in the University. He's goin' to make a study of the effects of locoweed on sheep.

"Wick," says Buck, "is our left tackle."

"Tackle?" whispers Dirty Shirt. "Yeah, yeah, that's the first sensible thing I've heard. Tackle. All he needs is a fishin' reel, tied on the back of his ol' red neck and he's ready to be used."

"I didn't mean fishin' tackle," says Buck.

"I did," says Dirty, "and I still do. And as far as locoweed is concerned, this here hamlet of horrors must be full of it. Ike, me and you better git out of here, before we start climbin' a tree to get a drink."

I don't remember much after that. I'm kinda hazy about takin' that examination. I got as far as the third grade in

BUCKSHOT IN THE BACKFIELD

■ cowtown school, but they wouldn't let ■ into it. Dirty Shirt won't talk about his education, because he says he don't remember it well enough to discuss it intelligently. But after we woke up, they said we passed with flyin'-colors.

I suspect that Dirty Shirt's red underwear was showin'. Old Testament and Magpie Simpkins gave us the examination and they said we got all A's, what that is. Magpie says, "You two are our honor students, because you passed higher'n anybody ever has."

Dirty says, "We was plenty high—if that's what yuh mean. What Buck puts in that whiskey is more'n I can figure. I assayed some of it one day, and it showed gold, silver, copper and lead. I poured some nitric acid in on it and the acid exploded. I dropped a forty-five ca'tridge into a bottle of it, and you could jist see that ca'tridge shrink. When the bottle was empty, all that's left was a BB shot."

"You're stretchin' the truth, Dirty," says Magpie.

"Well, yeah, I am," admitted Dirty. "It was only a tiny birdshot."

MAGPIE sets down with ■ and tells us all about what hist'ry will have to say about us. He says, "When the annals of this University are compiled, our names will lead all the rest. We are the founders of the greatest institution of learnin' ever proposed. This here game, which we will make annual, will be the steppin'-stone to the champion-ship of the world.

"Our names will be chiseled on the tablet in the front of the library, for all to see and admire. No longer shall ignorance stalk in Piperock—unless it comes in from Yaller Horse or Paradise. Piperock shall be knowned as the seat of all learnin'. Well, why don't you two snake-hunters nod or shake."

"I've been ashakin' ever since we got back here," says Dirty. "Now, will yuh set there and tell us in the English language jist what this all means? Me and Ike has passed a examination for somethin'. You've got our twenty-five bucks apiece, when we was too gowed-up to realize. What's to be done—and where does Paradise set into this intelligence operation? You're talkin' a language ■ and Ike don't sabe."

"Paradise," replies Magpie, "are ■ bunch of upstartin' copycats. They learns of our lofty purposes and tries to copper our bets. They organize the Paradise University—on stolen intelligence—and organize a football team. They've got brawn, but if the brains of the whole town was turned into powder it wouldn't kick a twenty-two bullet out of a three-inch barrel. However, in the spirit of our dear University, we must meet them in battle—not with guns and swords, but with brawn and superintelligence. We are the leaders, the pathfinders, the *e pluribus pertinacis* of everythin' worth while. That is the explanation, Dirty Shirt—and I hope you understand."

"It may come to me later, but I doubt it," says Dirty Shirt.

I says, "Magpie, I don't want to be pesty, and I don't want to show my vast store of ignorance, but how do yuh play football?"

"She's a complicated contrivance, Ike," he replies. "All sorts of formations, signals and all that. But we're makin' it easy for you and Dirty Shirt. You play left guard and Dirty Shirt plays right guard. It don't take brains to play them parts. All yuh have to do is stop everybody who runs in your direction. Simple, eh?"

"Not simple—jist plain ignorance," says Dirty Shirt. "When do we stop somebody and why?"

"The big game will be day after tomorrow at two o'clock, right here on the main street. It'll be the greatest speck-tickle ever seen, or I miss my guess. Paradise, aided and abetted by Yaller Rock, will be here to fight tooth and nail for P.U. You two will give yore all for the glory of U.P."

"Would it help any if me and Ike sneaked down there and gunned down a few Paradisers or Yaller Rockers?" asks Dirty Shirt. "No use givin' them heathen a even break, Magpie. There's a lot of muscle and hairy chests from down there, and our men seem to be kinda in the sere and yaller leaf."

"No," says Magpie. "Yuh see, Homicide Harrigan and Hip-shot Hines comes as a committee of two to varley on the rules, and we smoked a pipe on it. Guns is barred, likewise knives and rocks. No assassination before or after the game."

"Everythin' strictly amateur."

"Well," sighs Dity Shirt, "there ain't nothin' left for me and Ike to do, but to flex our chests against Buck's mahogany, I reckon."

I says, "Magpie, the idea of the University is prob'ly all right, but where is it?"

"In our minds, my boy," he says. "A glorious idea. But it will grow, be assured of that. Why, where on earth did you find as much open country as we have here? Miles of it. All we need is buildin's. And they will come in time."

"What about the fifty dollars you got from us two?" asks Dirty Shirt.

"I'll let yuh in on a secret," says Magpie. "We raised twelve hundred and fifty dollars through entrance fees. Paradise done the same thing—and we've bet even money on the game. Our winnin's will put up our first buildin'"—Magpie Simpkins Hall."

I says, "If yuh win, Magpie. If yuh don't, Piperock will be busted for years."

"Win?" queries Magpie. "Ha, ha!" he says. Just like that. "Truth will prevail, Ike. We shall swamp the heathen."

"Truth, huh?" says Dirty Shirt. "Since when has there been truth in Piperock? With a bet like that, you better hitch yore star to somethin' more stable than veracity in this village."

ME AND Dirty Shirt started for Buck's place, and I says, "How come you speak in strange tongues, my friend? I ain't never heard you discuss so melodiously before."

"I am, so I've been told," replies Dirty Shirt, "takin' up the study of English Philosophy. By the way, feller student, what subject are you takin' holt of?"

"Astronomy," says I, "and I don't know what it means."

"Neither do I. But don't worry. We ain't got no buildin' yet."

"By the time we do," says I, "astronomy will be forgotten."

"And me and you, too," sighs Dirty Shirt. "Right now, I'd like to learn more about football."

"So'd I," says I. "I asked Magpie for a little information and he said that a little learnin' might be dangerous. All we've got to do is knock down everythin' that comes toward us."

"Friend or foe?" asks Dirty.

"If you can sift the difference," I replies, "I'd be inclined to give a Piperock a little edge."

They've done wrote the names of the two teams on the blackboard in Buck's place.

The list for Piperock reads: Ike Harper, D. S. Jones, M. Simpkins, B. Masterson, Dugout Dulin, Muley Bowles, Hair Oil Heppner, Polecat Perkins, Doughgod Smith, Tombstone Todd and Telescope Tolliver.

For Paradise it reads like this: Homicide Harrigan, Hip Shot Hines, Cougar Collins, Doughbelly Dodds, Mica Moss, Telluride Tombs, Graveyard Grady, Fetlock Felton, Ornery Olson, Two Gun Taylor and One Ear Easton.

Dirty Shirt says, "That Piperock list shows a pre-ponderance of semi-civilized critters—but Paradise don't show a single decency. The preachers say that there's only two destinations after death, and that Paradise bunch wouldn't be welcome in either. Some sort of a neutral pothole will have to be set aside to take care of 'em."

Me and Dirty gets a couple quarts of Panther Paint and sets in the shade to relax and ponder. Homicide Harrigan, Hip Shot Hines and Graveyard Grady comes to town with a four-horse team and wagon, bringin' in some long poles. Me and Dirty don't even nod. Magpie and Old Testament join 'em, along with Pete Gonyer, our estimable village blacksmith, and they proceed to dig holes in the main street. They put down two holes, about twenty feet apart, and then they go down the street quite a way and put down two more.

Dirty says, "Must be goin' to bury their dead standin' up."

"They're for dead Paradisers," says I, "who don't know enough to lay down when they're dead."

Then they sunk posts in the holes and put a crossbar on the top.

"Now," says Dirty Shirt, "we're gettin' civilized agin; they're puttin' up the gallows before the crime is committed."

After they finish the job, Homicide, Hip Shot and Graveyard get in their wagon and drive back past the saloon, where me and Dirty are rusticatin'. Hip Shot stops the team and they look at us. Homicide says, "Fine lookin' pair of

athaleetics — you two muscle-bound snake-hunters. Haw, haw, haw!"

I ain't what you'd call peckish, and I'm hard to insult, but the tone of Homicide's voice irked me. I got up, squared away and walked out almost to the wagon, where I look them insultin', half-baked, mesquite-bean-eaters in their six eyes, and I ain't hardly launched into my oration, when Dirty Shirt yelps, "Don't waste words on 'em, Ike—leme at 'em with this loose bottle."

Well, sir, that little wobble-eye winds up with that bottle and let her fly, and them three refugees from a gallows went flat in the wagon. I heard that bottle whiz. That's all.

I wake up and find Liniment Lucas, our local horse doctor, in attendance. He sewed my scalp back into place, put a strip of burlap over it and tied it under my chin. I heard him tellin' Magpie and Old Testament, "I'll have him in shape for the game. After all, yuh play football with yore legs and arms. Any buttin' on his part will be strictly coincidental—and also painful."

I says, "Where at is Dirty Shirt, Liniment?"

"Hold it not agin him, Ike," says Testament. "His foot slipped. Right now, he's filled with re-morse—and a few other things. You'll be in fine fettle for the big game, Ike. Yuh may have to favor yore head a little, but, as Liniment says, yore head don't count in football."

I found Dirty Shirt, propped agin the shady side of the blacksmith shop. His wanderin' eye has trouble gettin' me lined up, but finally stopped jist off-center.

"I've tried to be filled with re-morse, Ike," he says, "but I can't quite make it. My the'ry is that you stuck yore darn head in my way. What's the burlap wrapped around yore head for?"

"Ain't you never heard of anybody repentin' in sack-cloth and ashes?" I asks.

"Got any ashes?" he asks.

"No, I'm over half-out of 'em. Give me that bottle, will yuh?"

He did. It helped the pain in my head. Dirty says, "I've looked this deal over from saddlehorn to honda, and it looks dangerous. Rules or no rules, I don't trust Paradise. No guns, no knives, no rocks. Huh! Ike, I'm participatin' grudgin'ly. I ■■■ live in spite of Pipe-

rock, but I refuse to die for her. Yuh see, while you've been healin' up, I've been listenin'."

"As I git it, we flip ■ coin. The winnin' side kicks the ball. See how simple it is. After that pandemonium reigns. When the reign is over, one side or the other has got the ball. We line up, facin' Paradise. Somebody yells a number—and pandemonium takes ■ back seat for the circus. You know what happened to Custer?"

"They tell me he got a bad deal."

"They say it was a massacree, Ike. In war, it's massacree; in football, it's annihilation, crude but complete. Kill that bottle; I'm settin' on a fresh one. Ike, I want yuh to know that I don't hold it agin yuh—gettin' yore head in front of that bottle—it might have killed somebody."

I says, "Yuh say yuh don't trust Paradise, Dirty Shirt—so what's the solution to yore problem?"

"I'm packin' ■ six-gun in each boot-top, and one inside my shirt"

"I'll work out some sort of de-fense," says I, "but right now it ain't quite clear jist what I'll do. Me and you have got fifty bucks invested in this deal, and we've got to protect our own."

NEXT mornin' I've got ■ pretty visibile case of swelled-head, but a couple drinks of Buck's Trouble Eliminator put me back on my two heels. Long about sunup folks begin to arrive in Piperock, and by noon you've got to be perfectly sober to keep from walkin' on people. They've got the street roped off between them two gallows, which Dirty Shirt calls gools, but the sidewalks are packed solid, and every house on the main street is groanin' from the load of alleged humanity on the roofs.

Old Deuteronomy Dooley, the preacher from Paradise, is struttin' around, bowin' to folks, and with him is Testament Tilton, our local soul snatcher. They've each got a little book tellin' how the game is played, which they consults regular. Magpie Simpkins and Homicide Harrigan holds ■ pow-wow together, bein' ■ they're bossin' the respective crews of Piperock and Paradise.

Magpie lines us all up in the back of Buck's place, and he says, "Men of our great University, ■■■■■ on the thresh-

old of our first great achievement. Today we smash the athaletic aspirations of our ancient rivals, P.U. Follerin' this signal victory, we shall go on to bigger things. The eyes of U.P. are upon yuh.

"You are out there to do or die. I shore hope yuh do. The thought of loss is abhorrent. Don't think; use yore heads. Let \blacksquare cross P.U.'s gool line a million times today. Yore names will go down in hist'ry. They will be inscribed on a golden tablet on the front of Simpkins Hall. Go out there and smite them hip and thigh. I have spoken."

"What'd yuh say?" asks Hair Oil Heppner, who ran into the hay-scales yesterday and lost his hearin'.

"I'll write it out for yuh after the game," says Magpie.

"I'd love to have a copy, too," says Polecat Perkins.

Magpie says, "Gents, the usual signal is with a whistle, but we've done changed that. I made \blacksquare rule that both Testament and Deuteronomy will signal with shot-guns. You'll learn. Blanks, of course."

I was afraid of somethin' like that. I watched Deuteronomy break open a fresh box of buckshot shells, and he shore didn't pull out the shot, when he stuffed his old sawed-off pump-gun with shells. The Cross J orchestra had seats \blacksquare top of Buck's porch, where they played *Sweet Mario* to every tune they ever heard. They're a three-piece band, with \blacksquare fiddle, guitar and \blacksquare bull-fiddle. I've heard that they are awful good, when they're sober. Fact is, I've only known 'em for ten, fifteen years, and I wouldn't know.

If you ain't never seen a cowtown street, it's kinda hard to figure out jist what sort of layout we've got to play on. This street ain't over forty feet wide, hard as \blacksquare rock, with high, board sidewalks along the sides, and she's bordered with false-fronted buildin's, on which sets the elite of Yaller Rock county, howlin' their fool heads off \blacksquare we parade out to the street.

I've absorbed jist enough of Buck's Rattlesnake Ration to numb my normal sense of self-defense. Magpie places me and Dirty Shirt in strategic positions. He tells us that Paradise has won the toss and will kick off. Me and Dirty gave three cheers. Dirty says, "Ike, let's go back and have another drink. I never

hoped to live long enough to \blacksquare that bunch of thieves kick off all to once."

The idea was good, but we had opposite ideas which way to go, and bumped into each other. By the time we got up agin, things is ready to begin. Ornery Olson is down on his hands and knees, and he's got the football on end, holdin' his hand on top of it. Me and Dirty ain't never seen the football before, and Dirty says, "Ball, heck! That's \blacksquare sunburned ostrich aig! Look out, Ike!"

Well, sir, here comes Homicide Harrigan, gallopin' like a spavin-legged mule, wavin' both arms and whoopin' like \blacksquare Comanche. It was a fine kick. In fact, I ain't never enjoyed any kick so much in all my life. It missed the football, and it caught Ornery Olson under the chin. Homicide kinda stuttered along on one leg, turned a hoolihan, and lit flat on his back in the dirt. Like Dirty Shirt said, pandemonium reigned. I went over and sat down on Homicide. After all, that ground is hard. Everybody else is fightin', but I don't know why. Pretty quick either Testament or Deuteronomy fired \blacksquare shot, and everybody relaxed.

"Piperock's ball!" yells Testament. "First down, ten to go!"

Magpie yelps, "Where at is that ball? Who's got the ball?"

A N investigatin' committee found that Dirty Shirt had it, and he was in Buck's place, havin' a drink. They took the ball and led him back to the street. Things are kinda hazy, it seems. A check-up showed that over half of both teams are crippled in one way or another, but there wasn't no complaints. We got all lined up, and Magpie yelled, "Six, seven, nine!" I yells, "You left out eight, you dumb snake-hunter!"

Jist then Telluride Tombs hit me dead center, knocked all the wind out of me, but I wrapped both arms around him, and we went for a waltz. The next thing I knowed we hit the waterin'-trough in front of the livery-stable and done \blacksquare double swan-dive.

After \blacksquare while they hauled us out, wrung out the water, and I was informed that it was first down and not over six inches to go. I thanked Telluride for the dance, and they led me back to my post of duty. Dirty Shirt tells me that he's beginnin' to like it. He says, "There ain't

■ rule agin bitin', Ike. I got me three ears in that last scuffle."

I says, "Looks t' me like you'd lost both of yours."

"I know it," he admits, "but I'm one up on Paradise, and all they can do to me now is to try and gnaw 'em closer."

Well, they got us all lined up agin, and we're awful close to them gool posts. Magpie yells, "One short heave and we've got six points, boys. Ike, don't let anybody go past yuh!"

Hair Oil Heppner slapped me on the back and knocked me down, jist as Magpie yells "Six, seven, nine!" I remember thinkin' how badly he needs education, as I climb up and here comes somebody. I don't look, I jist brace and grab. I heard my backbone go clinkety-clunk, like a string of empty box-cars, when the engine couples on kinda heavy.

I know I went down awful hard, and my chin bounces on somethin'. Men are fightin' all over and on top of me, but I crawled out, took that football and started runnin'.

I dunno where I went, but I do know that I hit somethin' kinda unyieldin' and went to sleep.

That is, I tried to sleep, but there's too much noise. Men are yellin' in my ears, and it ain't soothin' and sweet.

I hear Magpie's voice wailin', "That dad-blamed, ignorant rannahan scored six points for Paradise! He packed the ball the wrong way!"

I get my ears open and my eyes part-way. Magpie has lost half of his mustache, and one eye is closed. There's Buck Masterson, his neck in an S-curve, Telescope Tolliver, front teeth missin', his nose restin' on his left cheek. I says, "What happened?"

"We took time out," whispers Magpie. "Ike, you scored six points for Paradise. Don't yuh realize the ignominity of such practice?"

"Are we practicin'?" I asks. "Why, I was playin' for keeps."

"You're a disgrace to U.P.," says Buck. "You overplayed, that's all."

"There ain't nothin' gone past me yet," I says. "I'll show yuh."

I got up on my feet, but I reckon my rudder is busted. I think east and go west. Dirty Shirt leads me back to my position. He says, "We kick off this time, Ike."

I says, "Wait a minute. We're too young to die, Dirty."

But I was too late in my warnin'. That shotgun blasted and here we go! I tried to run, but it wasn't much use. Magpie kicked that ball straight up in the air. I tried to look up, lost my balance and sat down awful hard, jist as about seven fellers fell over me. They kicked me in exactly seven distinct spots, I think. I hears everybody screamin' and yellin'. Dirty Shirt falls over me, and beat me over the head with both hands. He screams, "You done it! You done it! Magpie caught that ball and made a touchdown! You stopped the whole Paradise team, Ike! Yo're a hero."

That's fine. So I'm a hero, am I. Both eyes out of line, one ear half-way unscrewed, backbone shattered, two legs, each with separate ideas. I'm a hero. I don't want no applause. All I want is a real quiet place to lay down and die. But they're yankin' me to my feet and draggin' me for more of the same. Magpie yells in my loose ear, "We're goin' to kick the extra point!"

WELL, they lined ■ up again. I dunno what happened. I heard Magpie yellin' some more numbers, and them Paradise cripples are all headin' for me, with everybody screamin' their lungs out. I jist leaned forward, kinda like them leanin' towers of Piazza. I can't lift either arm. I know they hit me. I heard it. But I didn't feel it. I went up high enough to look along the ridgepole of Buck's place, and when I came down I heard somethin' squish. Things is sort of a cross between pandemonium and hysteeria. I heard somebody scream. "They didn't make it; we're still all even!"

All even! I rolled over and discovers that I'm layin' on top of Deuteronomy Dooley, the sky-pilot of Paradise. He's got both arms wrapped around that sawed-off riot-gun, and he's singin', soft and low, "Oh, where is my wanderin' boy tonight, the boy of my tenderest care."

"I never knew you was a family man, Deuteronomy?" I remarks. "How is yore woman?"

He don't say. Maybe they've done been deevorced. I yanked that shotgun loose from him, and his arms snapped right back. I tell yuh, he's the stiffest

person I ever knowed that didn't have a undertaker in attendance. Men are runnin' past us, whoopin' and yelpin', but I I don't pay no attention. I've got that shotgun, and if I can git my two legs to cooperate with my fondest hopes, I'm goin' far, far away from that scene of carnage.

I got up all right, braced myself for any eventuality, and jist then that football came end over end, right at my head. I didn't dodge—I couldn't. I tell yuh, I've had all the dodge knocked out of my system. It hit me right between the eyes, and went straight up in the air.

I jist yelled, "Hurrah for heck—whose afraid of fire?" fell flat on my back and I felt that old shotgun go off. I didn't hear it, just felt it buck in my numb fingers.

Then somebody stepped on my Adam's apple, and my light went out in a gush of cider.

I don't know how long I slept. It's night, and I'm on a blanket on the sand, and Dirty Shirt is makin' coffee over a little fire.

"I see yo're alive," he remarks, I says, "Defective eyesight is an awful thing, Dirty. How'd we git here?"

"Well," Dirty sets back on his heels and wipes some smoke out of his swollen eyes, "I found yuh under the sidewalk,

after the massacree was over, and dragged yuh home. I had to rope yuh on the jackass, and here we are. I don't think we've been follerred."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Happened? Well, sir, I'll tell yuh what happened. You hit that football with a full charge of buckshot from Deuteronomy's shotgun, and blew the remains across the gool post, where I tripped and fell on it. That's the only ball they had. So the game's over. It was only a ball; and after a few pers'nal battles, Old Testament ruled that, bein' as a field-gool is three points, he could only allow half that many. Paradise wins, seven and a half to six, Piperock's busted as flat as that football, and me and you are fugitives from U.P."

I says, "I may have a warped mind, Dirty, but I ain't sorry. A little learnin' is a dangerous thing—and Piperock couldn't stand it."

"I think yo're right, Ike," admits Dirty. "Even in ignorance Piperock is too dangerous to monkey with. I found out another thing, Ike, which might interest yuh. Astronomy is the study of the old stars, and findin' a few ones besides."

"Thank you, feller student," says I. "And now you can shake hands with Professor Harper. I've see 'em all—old and new."

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Six Point Engineer

Baldy Jasperson didn't know what football woes were until he ran into a model train

JASPERSON rose from the bench and watched his team trot off the field. Even in victory, the lines of suffering were discernible in "Baldy" Jasperson's round face. It had not been an

easy season. Any season featuring Homer Boffel would not be an easy one.

Taking a last gander at the score-board, by way of making sure his eyes had not been deceiving him all after-

By EDWARD HOWEY



Straight down the middle, the big Buffalo lumbered

noon, Baldy turned to the slight, be-spectacled, young man beside him.

"Simpkins," said Baldy, "the Baxter game next Saturday is all-important."

"Sleepy" Simpkins nodded eager as-sent.

"I want you to keep a triple watch on Homer this week, Simpkins. We can't afford to take any chances."

The student manager was impressed. "Yessir, I sure will, Coach." He shook his head, a wondering expression on his pinched face. "Golly, Homer was great this afternoon! Imagine, scoring three touchdowns against a team like State!" Awed reverence tinged Sleepy's voice. "I can sure see why you want me to watch him like a hawk. We wouldn't want a recurrence of what happened in the Belmont game, eh, Coach?"

Under Baldy's reproving glance, Sleepy's half-formed laugh froze to a sickly grin. The Belmont incident was a touchy point with Baldy Jasperson, one which he would rather forget.

Having been accused that their undefeated record stemmed from a cream-puff schedule, Baldy's surprising Parnell University Indians had needed a win over Belmont to convince the skeptics. The consternation of the jittery coach was understandable then, when a few minutes before game time he had received the crushing news that the great Homer Boffel was nowhere on the premises.

With Baldy approaching a state of nervous collapse, a search party scoured the countryside as the game got underway. They finally located the errant full-back on an empty lot enthusiastically engaged in assisting a group of young Americans to fly model airplanes. The ball game had slipped Homer's mind completely.

Baldy shuddered at the memory. There had been other capers, but this had been the topper. Still frowning, he said, "You're certainly right, Simpkins."

Sleepy drew himself up to his full five feet, three inches.

"You can count on me, Coach."

The stadium was almost empty now. Baldy Jasperson walked slowly toward the dressing-room, and the rotund coach permitted himself a certain sense of satisfaction. Just one more game,

and Parnell U. would have a bowl bid in the bag. There was a good possibility, also, that Baldy Jasperson would cop coach-of-the-year honors, because in the preseason dope the Indians had been rated strictly a pushover.

But that was before Baldy had unveiled his sophomore sensation, Homer "The Buffalo" Boffel.

Whistling contentedly, Baldy swung around the corner of the stands. Then he saw Homer Boffel, and he stopped whistling.

Homer stood at the dressing-room door earnestly conversing with a gnome-like little man who wore a freshman dink, though he looked like no freshman Baldy had ever seen. Furthermore, the little man seemed to be offering Homer a fistful of money.

BALDY steamed toward the pair. He looked at the little man, then at Homer, then he scowled.

"Who is your friend, Homer?" he asked belligerently.

Homer fumbled with his helmet, his mild, blue eyes watching Baldy uncertainly. He seemed tongue-tied. The stranger shifted a frayed cigar.

"Allow — t' interduce myself, Coach," the man said. "Six-Point Sorgoff is the name. I am a very leral follower of yer fine pigskin pushers." With this, he commenced to wave a blue-and-gold Parnell pennant under Baldy's nose. "Yaaaaaaay, Parnell!" cried "Six-Point" Sorgoff. "Rah! Rah! Rah!"

"Was this clown offering you money, Homer?" Baldy sputtered.

"Mr. Sorgoff," Homer said meekly, swallowing hard, "is always offering — money, but —"

"But he won't never take a dime," Six-Point Sorgoff finished. "Not a dime! It don't figger, Coach. Every Saturday, Homer knocks hisself out—for what?" He pushed the money toward Homer. "Since the first game of the season, I ride along with Parnell on a hunch, an' I been coinnin' it, Coach, coinnin' it! . . . Take it, kid," insisted Six-Point. "I'm loaded!"

Baldy's ruddy face took on a mottled hue, and Homer Boffel cringed.

"Sorgoff!" Baldy barked, "if I ever see you hanging around here again, I'll

have the stadium cops on you so fast it'll make your ears whistle!"

The Parnell pennant in Six-Point's hand drooped dejectedly.

"Ain't it always the way?" he said sadly. "A guy tries t' do the right thing, and what happens? Somebody hollers fer the law."

Shrugging, he shoved the money into a pocket and left.

"Golly, Mr. Jasperson!" Homer Boffel looked reproachfully at his coach. "Six-Point didn't mean any harm. He was just—"

"Never mind!" Baldy said. "Go take a shower."

"But it doesn't make any difference anyway," persisted Homer. "I—"

Baldy held up a restraining hand. "Homer, my boy," he said patiently, "believe me, I am thinking of you. Sorgoff is a bum. A no-good gambler." He put his hand on the big youngster's shoulder. "Go take a shower, son. If there is something on your mind, stop in the office when you're dressed."

Back at his desk in the small office, Baldy relaxed. There was really nothing to worry about, he told himself. Homer had his faults, but there wasn't a crooked bone in the big lad's body.

From the desk drawer, Baldy withdrew a soiled page of notepaper. With the stub of a pencil, he added an entry to the column of figures: PARNELL—28: MIDDLE STATE—0. His eye ran up the column, and he sighed contentedly. Seven games, seven wins. It was an impressive record. Already the bowl feelers were coming in.

If they got by Baxter the coming week, they could not miss, and though he had never expressed his sentiments publicly, Baldy was certain his boys would come through. And if Homer Boffel was right, they would chase the upstate team right out of the stadium.

Baldy was dreamily contemplating those warm weeks in the Southland, expenses paid, when he heard a hesitant rap on the door.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened and Homer Boffel entered. Baldy's eyes bugged.

In his arms, Homer was carrying his football equipment. Pads, pants, shoes,

headgear—the complete regalia.

It was a startling sight, but Baldy Jasperson maintained a stoical calm. Through bitter experience, he had learned the necessity for keeping cool when dealing with his eccentric gridiron discovery.

Homer spied the table in the corner, walked over, and unloaded his gear.

"Gosh," he remarked, "a fellow doesn't realize how heavy all that stuff is!"

"I guess not," said Baldy, eyeing him warily.

"Well, Coach," Homer said heartily, advancing toward the desk, one giant mitt outstretched, "it's been a lot of fun playing football. I hope I've been able to help out a little!"

THOUGH he had prepared himself well, Baldy was visibly shaken by this sally. He closed his eyes, then opened them slowly. The hand, like an apparition, was still there. Rising, he took it cautiously.

"Homer, my boy," said Baldy, a ghastly smile on his face, "perhaps you have overlooked the fact that there is still one game on our schedule."

"Nossiree," said Homer confidently, "I haven't forgotten. It's a big game and I'd love to play. But—"

"Look, son," put in Baldy, "if you're peeved because I got mad at your friend, Mr. Sorgoff—"

"Shucks, no! I'd never let a little thing like that bother me. Don't worry about it, Coach."

Nodding, Baldy sat on the edge of the desk. "Then why," he inquired, with a sort of desperate calm, "will you be unable to play next Saturday?"

Homer was taken aback.

"Golly, Mr. Jasperson, don't you remember?" he said. "I told you about it in September. It's the convention."

With a leap that shattered his tortured calm, Baldy soared from the desk top. His voice was a strangled roar.

"What convention?"

Fright sprang up into Homer's eyes. He retreated a few paces, his lips moving soundlessly. Strange noises gurgled in his throat. Baldy stalked him.

"What convention?" he repeated grimly.

Words tumbled from Homer's mouth.

"The annual convention of the Model Railroaders Association of America," he blurted. "In Chicago."

Baldy Jasperson folded like an over-loaded beach chair. He pulled distractedly at the fringe of hair that ringed his pate. In the heavy silence, Homer eyed him fearfully. Finally Baldy spoke.

"Homer," he said, "I want you to forget about that convention. Forget about model railroads. There is a football game to be played Saturday, and you are going to be in it!"

Homer wagged his head. "I can't do it," he protested miserably. "Last September I told you I couldn't do it. I've got to take the *Chief* out to Chicago."

Rising, Baldy threw a fatherly arm around the fullback's wide shoulders. "This ball game is vital," he pled. "Let the chief go by himself."

"I should say not!"

"Okay, I'll assign somebody to go with him."

"You don't understand, Mr. Jasperson. The *Chief* is my model train." Homer's expression grew wistful. "She's a beauty! Four years I've worked on her, and now she's ready. Dad's going to be out there—he's a railroad engineer. We'll be shooting for first prize in the HO class."

It was this that finished the coach of Parnell U., because there could be no doubt now that Homer was serious.

"Okay," he said groggily. "I'm not going to argue with you. Just do one thing for me. Take your gear"—he pointed toward the laden table—"and put it back in your locker, and think this over. Look at it from all angles, my boy. Maybe you will change your mind."

"I'll do it, Coach," Homer said doubtfully, as he scooped up the equipment, "but I don't think I'll change my mind. For ten years now, Dad's been after first prize. He thinks this is the year."

"Stop around and see me if you change your mind," Baldy nodded, holding the door open.

When Homer had gone, Baldy leaned weakly against the wall, collecting the last remnants of his sanity. Then he poked his head out the door.

"Simpkins!" he bawled.

A startled face appeared at the equipment window.

"On the double!" Baldy snapped.

A moment later, Sleepy Simpkins stood before the harassed coach.

"Close the door," Baldy growled, "and listen close."

With gestures, he related the details of his conversation with Homer. Sleepy's myopic orbs widened.

"Simpkins," Baldy finished ominously, "something's got to be done! I want you to work on that knucklehead. Get the fraternity brothers to work on him. Plead, shame, threaten—do *anything* to change his mind! Got it?"

"Yessir!" Sleepy leaped to his feet. "I'll fix that boy. Why, he can't do this to us!"

WHETHER he could or not, the mere suggestion that he might was enough to leave Baldy Jasperson with a severe case of the screaming memeies. All day Sunday he roamed glassy-eyed about his home, and his wife worriedly herded the children from his path.

The situation reached the critical stage by Tuesday morning, with still no report from Sleepy. Unable to stand it any longer, Baldy summoned the student manager to his office.

"Well?" Baldy snarled.

"I don't know, Coach," Sleepy said sadly. "The lad must have rocks in his head. We even threatened to blackball him, but he didn't care."

Baldy jabbed a finger at the newspaper that lay open before him. "See that? The greatest football team in the history of Parnell University, and those fellows are making a joke out of it!" His voice rose thunderously. "We've got to be calm. Simpkins, calm! There's a way. There *must* be a way!" He started to pace the room.

"I forgot one thing," Sleepy's face brightened suddenly. "There's been a shady-looking fellow hanging around our neighborhood the past few days. A person by the name of Six-Point Sorgoff."

"Sorgoff!" Then, after a thoughtful moment, Baldy shook his head. "No, that's not it. Nobody could buy Boffel. He's not smart." He stopped abruptly, his mouth hanging open. Inspiration made his eyes glow. "I've got it!"

Sleepy waited breathlessly.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" Baldy exulted. He rubbed his hands together happily. "Simpkins, get this, and get it straight. I want you to dig up the loveliest blonde coed on this campus. Understand? Something on the order of Lana Turner, only more so."

"I don't know, Coach." Sleepy shook his head dubiously.

Baldy laughed for the first time in three days.

"When you're as old as I am, you'll know, all right!" he said. "Guys like Homer Boffel were made for beautiful blondes to wrap around their finger. Get going, Simpkins, and call me when you find her."

The following morning, Sleepy straggled into the coach's office. Sleepy looked bad. And the news he brought was in the same vein.

"Simpkins," said Baldy coldly, "you like your job, don't you?"

"Sure I do," Sleepy replied unhappily. "Golly, Coach, I'm trying. I haven't been to class today. And twice I almost got pinched as a Peeping Tom."

"I want results!" Baldy pounded the desk. "If you can't find one on the campus, go elsewhere. But get as a blonde!"

Inspired, Sleepy returned to the search, and by nightfall he was rewarded. In a local bistro, he uncovered a young lady who would fill the bill. And he so notified Baldy.

Leaving nothing to chance, Baldy arranged to meet them, and he was forced to admit that despite his spectacles, Sleepy had a very discerning eye. Miss Carole Grant was an appetizing dish.

Baldy outlined his plan carefully. When he finished, he put his hands on Sleepy's shoulders.

"Simpkins, my boy, if this fails, we're sunk." He paused gravely. "It won't fail. Right?"

"Right!"

"Good boy. Call me at home the minute anything develops."

THAT evening, after convincing his wife that he was definitely *not* in need of a psychiatrist, Baldy hunched over the telephone and waited. Sleepy's call came shortly after eleven. "I'm at

the party, Coach," the student manager said.

"Okay, okay. So what happened?"

"Well," Sleepy said reluctantly, "I brought Homer along and introduced him to Carole. Then I left them alone together, like you said."

"Yeah," Baldy broke in impatiently, "then what?"

"When Carole wasn't looking, Homer ran away!"

Baldy laughed numbly, "How's that again?" he said.

"Honest he did, Coach."

Baldy put the phone down and walked slowly into the living room. Mrs. Jasper found him there some time later. He was seated cross-legged on the floor, meticulously scanning the help-wanted columns.

At her insistence, he retired, but it was a fitful slumber, punctuated by visions of a man-eating locomotive that chased him all over the campus.

As he waited for Sleepy the next morning, Baldy's face was drawn and haggard. He read the sports pages in helpless anger. The comments of the scribes had lost some of their piquant quality, were becoming a bit vitriolic.

He shoved the paper aside with a muttered growl, then sat up quickly as a hesitant rap sounded on the door.

"Come in!" he bellowed.

Homer Boffel entered. Baldy's hopes leaped wildly, until he saw the expression on Homer's face. Homer was distinctly perturbed.

"Sit down, my boy," Baldy said solicitously.

Homer shook his head.

"What seems to be the trouble?" Baldy asked.

"It's gone!"

Baldy caught his breath. "Gone?" he queried, scarcely daring to hope.

"The *Chief*," Homer said indignantly. "Somebody stole it out of my room last night!"

In the nick of time, Baldy suppressed a series of wild cheers.

"You don't say!" he breathed, matching Homer's indignation.

"I do say!" Homer insisted. "And I think I've got an idea who stole it." Homer hesitated. "I'll bet it was that Sleepy Simpkins!"

"Sleepy?" Baldy looked aghast. "Why, I don't think he'd do a thing like that. Theft is a pretty serious charge around here, you know."

"I know it," said Homer firmly, "and if he did it, he's going to be sorry."

As he spoke, the office door swung open and Sleepy Simpkins appeared. He hesitated a moment, glaring sourly at Homer Boffel. Baldy crossed the room quickly.

"Come in, Simpkins, come in," he greeted. "You're just the man we're looking for."

"I'll say he is!" Homer said, returning the student manager's glare.

Baldy held up a hand. "Wait a minute now, Homer," he cautioned. "Let me handle this." With a broad wink, Baldy faced his lieutenant. "Simpkins," he said gravely, "someone has perpetrated a felony on our friend Homer. Some low-down thief has stolen the *Chief*. Now, you wouldn't do a thing like that, would you, Simpkins?"

"I'll say I wouldn't!" Sleepy snorted. "What's more, if that overgrown moose said I did, I'll sock him in the eye, a big a he is!"

"Take it easy," Baldy soothed. He turned to Homer. "See? Simpkins wouldn't do a thing like that."

"Well, maybe not," Homer said skeptically. "But he's been in my hair all week. Him and all the rest of them. They're all sore because I'm not going to play Saturday."

Taking the distracted fullback's elbow, Baldy eased him toward the door.

"Leave everything to me," he said expansively. "We'll start a search. We'll comb every inch of this campus, and if the *Chief's* to be found, we'll find it!"

Homer's face brightened. Baldy lowered his voice to a confidential tone. "Another thing, son. I wouldn't go to the police about this just yet," he cautioned. "Might scare the thief into leaving town." He bobbed his head sagely.

Four seconds after Homer had departed, Baldy commenced to whistle. He slapped Sleepy Simpkins on the back.

"Simpkins," he said heartily, "we've got it made!"

"But, Coach—"

"Quiet," Baldy ordered. "I don't want to know a thing." His brows lowered

sternly. "I am not insinuating you understand, but if the *Chief* turns up before Saturday, a certain student manager is going to be looking for a new job!"

Sleepy frowned worriedly, started to speak.

"Quiet!" Baldy said again. "Not another word." He sighed contentedly. "No *Chief*, no convention. And, assuming the blasted train remains lost, which it will—" he glared meaningfully at Sleepy—"all I've got to do is persuade Homer that he should go out and fight for old Parnell."

PARNELL Stadium had never seen a crowd like the one that jammed the big bowl for the payoff battle. Though last reports were that Homer Boffel would not be in the line-up, Parnell adherents refused to give up hope. And when the familiar figure of The Buffalo lumbered onto the gridiron, they loosed a roar that flattened the gridiron grass.

Baldy Jasperson beamed like a new father. The unexpected appearance of the great Roffel would undoubtedly be a blow to the morale of the Baxter eleven. Baldy envisioned the morrow's news stories:

"Another bit of clever skulduggery by crafty, old Baldy Jasperson today paved the way for Parnell's decisive—"

They were pleasant dreams, but like most of their species, they were short-lived. These expired about thirty seconds after the opening whistle.

Baxter kicked off. Homer was under the ball on the Indian ten, and right away Baldy got a sniff of trouble. First, The Buffalo bobbled the kick. When he finally captured the oval and got under way, he moved like an overloaded trailer truck. On the twenty, three of the enemy annihilated him, and the bewildered Buffalo fumbled. A maroon jersey smothered the loose pigskin.

If Homer's unexpected appearance had affected Baxter morale, it was hardly noticeable. Before Baldy was comfortably settled on the bench, the Maroon team struck hard and fast. In exactly three plays, their hipper-dipper attack carried them across the goal line.

Baldy lost no time in making it known

that he was displeased. He sent eleven ~~men~~ into the ball game, and gathered the stunned first-stringers around him.

"You might all glance at the score-board," he said bitingly. "It says you are now seven points away from a trip over the holidays!" He glared at them. "Now, come alive! I want that touchdown back fast. Then I want a few more, ~~so~~ I can sit back and enjoy the ball game."

It was a fine speech, but unfortunately there were eleven huskies in maroon who would not cooperate. And at least one clad in the blue and gold of Parnell might have been similarly classified.

Homer Boffel played like a sleepwalker. Twice again before the first period ended he fumbled at crucial moments, and only valiant work by the Parnell forwards averted further disaster.

In the second quarter, while Homer stood idly contemplating his number fourteens, Baxter's "Scooter" McGee flipped a neat pass over the Buffalo's head. A Maroon end snared it on the dead run and was gone like a big bird. Baxter missed the conversion, however.

Baldy leaped to his feet, pulling frantically on his fringe of hair as the fleet Baxter end went all the way.

"Look at that elephant," Baldy wailed. "He's unconscious!"

Sleepy Simpkins shook his head sadly. "I guess he can't get his mind off the *Chief*."

"So help me," Baldy vowed, "if we lose this one, I'll take an axe to that blasted thing!"

Between halves, Baldy was at his outraged best. He combed his athletes with an assortment of adjectives that left little for their imaginations to dwell upon. Homer Boffel came in for special consideration.

They went out for the second half with fire in their eyes. But it was the same old story. Homer's heart was not in the game, and without the big fullback's pulverizing line backs, the Parnell attack couldn't dent a jellyfish.

His chin almost touching his knees, Baldy peered glumly out at the debacle. Sleepy Simpkins cast a worried glance at the coach.

"Golly, Mr. Jasperson," Sleepy said,

"if only Homer would get going. If we could stir him up some way, get him mad at Baxter, or something."

Suddenly, Baldy jerked upright. "Quiet!" he barked. "Quiet, Simpkins, I'm thinking." He gazed skyward, a far-away look on his face. Then he slapped his leg triumphantly. "I've got it! Simpkins, why can't you think of these things?"

Jumping up, he looked down the bench. "Dale," he snapped.

The substitute threw off his blanket. "Get in there for Boffel," Baldy ordered.

A moment later, Homer trotted toward the bench. He looked very unhappy. Baldy met him at the side line and took him by the arm.

"Homer," he said gravely, "I almost hate to have to tell you this."

Homer had a very dismayed look on his face.

"I know, Coach," he mumbled. "I've been terrible today."

"That's not it, son." Baldy shook his head. "We all have our off days. It's just that I don't know whether I could put you back in the ball game after you hear the news."

"News?" Homer's expression lightened a bit.

"Homer," Baldy announced, "the *Chief* has been located!"

MAGICALY, the hang-dog look departed the face of Homer Boffel. "Where, Coach?" he asked eagerly. "Who had her?"

"That is the bad part. Maybe I better not tell you till after the game. But—I feel you have a right to know." Baldy paused. "The *Chief*," he said finally, with an air of great reluctance, "was located on the campus of Baxter University, suspended from a clothes' line in ignominious display!"

"The dirty bums!" Homer gasped indignantly.

"That's why I can't let you go out there," Baldy continued. "Why, the way you'd go after those crooks, Homer, the way you'd pulverize them, somebody might get hurt!"

Homer was pulling on his helmet like a knight of old in a hurry.

"I'm going back in, Coach," he

snarled. "Don't try to stop me. I'll show those smart-alecks!"

He broke loose from Baldy's restraining grip.

"I understand," the coach shouted after him, "that they planned to burn it in a public place, too!"

Homer must have heard, because he picked up speed suddenly. Smiling contentedly, Baldy walked toward the bench, noting that, by an odd coincidence, he had been standing directly in front of the press box — he was talking to Homer.

Playing safe behind their two touch-down lead, Baxter punted out on third down. Williams, Parnell's safety, brought it back to the Indian thirty. At that point, Homer took charge.

On a straight buck, The Buffalo went into the Baxter line—and everybody in the stadium stood up. Homer burst through the Maroon forward wall — though he were hitting a paper hoop. Straight down the middle, the big Buffalo lumbered.

The Baxter safety made an heroic try, but Homer steam-rollered the unfortunate fellow, and jogged the rest of the way to the jubilant roar of his happy followers.

Receiving the kickoff, Baxter tried to go. The blue-and-gold line promptly discouraged them, slapping down three ground plays for a net loss of seven yards.

The punt went out on the Parnell fifteen as the third period ended.

Sitting on the bench, Baldy Jasperson hummed as Homer stalked around in impatient circles, pausing now and then to glare fiercely at the Baxter squad.

The final period was all Homer's. Tirelessly, he banged the middle, slashed the tackles, and on occasion ambled around an end as he wreaked his vengeance on the Baxter aggregation.

In the press box, the typewriters sang when The Buffalo ploughed across from the ten to tie up the ball game. A moment later the conversion was good, and Parnell took the lead.

But Homer's fury had not yet spent itself, and before the battle was history he had scored another touchdown. And he set up a fourth to make the final tally 28-13. Baldy scurried onto the field,

grabbed Homer, and wrung his hand.

"You were great, son!" Baldy cried. "Terrific!"

"Excuse me, Coach," Homer said, his face dark, "but I've got to hurry."

"Hey, what's the rush? Where're you you going?"

"I'm going after the *Chief*, that's where I'm going!" Homer said firmly. "The crooks!"

"Now wait a minute," Baldy said hastily. "As a matter of fact, I've got someone working on that right now. You go ahead and take your shower."

"Well, okay, if you say so." Homer looked doubtful. "But I'm not going to wait long."

"Boy, oh boy, Coach, look at him." Sleepy Simpkins snickered. "He's — boiling!"

Baldy grinned. "He'll cool off. But you'd better get the *Chief* back to him right away." He thought for a moment. "Tell you what you do, Simpkins—take it up to his room and leave it there before he gets back. I'll tell him we recovered it for him. Right?"

"Right!" Sleepy snapped. "Where," he asked briskly, "will I find it, Coach?"

"You'll find—" Baldy stopped suddenly. He glared suspiciously at the student manager. "What d'you mean, where'll you find it? You've got it, of course."

"Golly, I tried to tell you!" Sleepy was sadly wagging his head. "Then, when you wouldn't let me, I figured you had it."

Baldy whistled. "Holy smokes! What — I going to tell Homer? The kid'll think I'm a first-class heel."

"I hope he doesn't run amuck," Sleepy said worriedly.

A LOOK of surprise crept suddenly across Baldy's face. Sleepy followed his gaze. He saw a strange figure approaching. It was a gnomelike little man, sporting a blue Parnell dink and carrying a large package in one hand and a Parnell pennant in the other. He waved the pennant at Baldy.

"Yaaaaay, Parnell," said Six-Point Sorgoff. "Rah! Rah! Rah!"

"I thought I told you to stay away from here," Baldy said scowling.

"As of at once," Six-Point said, a happy grin on his countenance, "I will

say, 'Or-vwar'." He thrust the package at Baldy. "It would be very obligin', if you would toin this bundle over t' my boy, Homer."

With this, Six-Point gave a final flourish with his pennant, and faded into the throng.

Baldy Jasperson scratched his chin. He looked at the package, then at Sleepy. Then he steamed rapidly toward the dressing-room door.

Homer was in the shower. Baldy yanked him out. "Your friend, Mr. Sorgoff, left this," said Baldy darkly.

Homer ripped the paper away and opened the box. Inside, glistening and as good as new, lay the *Chief*.

A folded piece of paper lay on top. Homer picked it up. Something fluttered to the floor, and as he retrieved it, Baldy blinked. It was a one-hundred-dollar bill.

Homer squinted at the hastily written scrawl.

"It says," he read slowly: "I hope you will not think I am a heel, Homer, but for business reasons I could not afford for you to be in Chicago today.

Enclosed is a small token of gratitude, a little scratch to buy yerself some new trains or something. Nobody knew you was going to play today, Homer, so at four to one odds, I give Baxter and thirteen pernts. Believe me, I kin afford the century note."

Folding the letter, Homer stared into the box.

"But Mr. Jasperson," he said finally, "I thought you said the *Chief* was on the Baxter campus."

"I had to do something, son," Baldy grinned uncomfortably. "No hard feelings?"

Homer shook his head and sat down.

"You know, Coach," he said thoughtfully, "I guess you were right about Mr. Sorgoff. Not only is he a gambler, but," he finished indignantly, "he is also a thief!"

Nodding absently, the coach stared into the box where the *Chief* rested in innocent repose. And in that instant, Baldy Jasperson came to a decision. Come the first of January and the bowl game, he and his Parnell Indians would travel by air!

 ADVERTISEMENT

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Chris charged hard
and got the ball



LUCKY STIFF

Chris Stoffel learns that in order to fill another man's shoes you need a lot more than just the same size feet!

CHRIS STOFFEL looked up from tying his cleated shoes and met the going-away gaze of Ollie Peders, backfield coach of the Eastern U. varsity. Chris smothered the grin of satisfaction that Peders' inquiring glance

summoned while he mentally thanked his stars that Eastern U. didn't let freshmen play varsity football.

"A year ago I wouldn't have taken it," Chris thought again as he ducked his red head down and needlessly re-

By KENNY KENMARE

inspected his carefully tied laces. "A year ago I would have told Kiki Cranston off, and maybe even Bucky Tyler himself. That lucky stiff Tyler!"

"Kiki" Cranston was head coach at Eastern University and "Bucky" Tyler was—well, he was Bucky Tyler. To the uninitiated who sat in close-packed tiers up the sides of Eastern Bowl, Bucky Tyler was a two-times All-American fullback, and unless he broke a leg off his rangy, powerful frame, he would make it again. Just as surely as Chris Stoffel wouldn't get a chance to star in this, his sophomore year, unless Bucky Tyler did break a leg.

It didn't matter that Chris was as powerful in build as Bucky was. Not to Coach Cranston, it didn't. It didn't matter that Chris was two years younger and two steps faster and had been star and fullback and captain of the Eastern frosh squad the year before.

"Bucky Tyler is lucky." Chris was thinking about the setup. "Bucky got here two years ahead of me, when they needed a guy to puff up, and Bucky got the publicity and Bucky will keep on getting it."

In his freshman year Chris had been naive and trusting. He had had the idea that coaches of big-time college squads played their men and not their angles. But now he was smartened up. Now he had savvy. Now he knew that coaches followed the line of least resistance in filling the huge stadiums, just as they taught their quarterbacks to follow the line of least resistance when scheming a scoring play.

"Bucky's had two years of hogging the headlines, and it worked swell for two years, so why change it?"

IT WAS that simple. What Chris had to do was equally simple. He could see it now, with the cynical insight that a year of college gives a fellow. A fellow who is smart enough to look beyond the window-dressing, that is.

"I'll just have to wait my turn." Chris had seen it after three games of bench-

warming duty had gone by. "It is one of the immutable laws of the way of things in the world. The guy in the saddle orders the pace. There may be one or a dozen lads who could do it as well, or better, but that doesn't matter. What counts is who is in the saddle now. And that is Bucky Tyler."

Once he had been smart enough to see that, Chris had also been smart enough to handle himself with understanding. He had quit giving it the old collegerty in practise. You could break an arm or a shoulder in a Tuesday scrimmage just as easy as in a big game. Also, Chris had lost his starry-eyed reverence when the big-shots were sounding off.

He had listened in silence when the head coach or the backfield coach had directed this or suggested that or cautioned against the other. With eyes cynical, he made no especial attempt to control the hard amusement that tugged the corners of the Stoffel mouth. He could take it now because next year Bucky would be gone and then someone else would have to take it, while he, Chris, got the headlines.

Not that there weren't a few older varsity men already hanging around waiting for the designation of first-string fullback. There were. No less than three others, and that didn't count Lemmy Nixon, who had subbed for Chris in their undefeated frosh year.

But it gripped him that his dad and his mother came from their not-too-distant home to each game to watch him play, brought Dorie Sanders with them, and didn't even get to see him, Chris, play.

Oh, sure, Chris and the rest of the third-platoon went out for the opening kickoff whenever an opponent started a less-than-top string in a game and Eastern won the toss. But a defensive fullback in a kickoff should be made to pay admission, in Chris' book, he was that far out of the play.

It burned him some that his parents and Dorie stood in their places to cheer him when he came off the field, as if he

had run the ball for a score, or done something brilliant.

"Why don't they grow up?" he groused to himself. "Why don't they see this setup the way I do and the way it really is? The stands have got to be filled, Bucky Tyler has been picked to make the headlines, and the ushers will see more action in one Saturday than I will all season."

Something had happened, the week before, to confirm Chris in his sizing up of the way things were, and to make him one with the coaches and some of the varsity regulars in the understanding if not in the play of the games.

He had been listening with only partial interest to one of Kiki Cranston's pep talks before the Southern State game when he was suddenly aware that Kiki's gray eyes were peculiarly aware of Chris Stoffel in that audience of sixty-four other players.

Kiki had seemed to address some words directly at Chris and then had turned his gaze away, and brought it back again. Ollie Peders had come over a little later to ask Chris if he felt all right.

"In the pink, Coach, in the pink," Chris had affirmed.

"Still raring to go?" Peders had pursued it, his dark eyes studious on Chris.

"Oh, sure," Chris had nodded, with his new little grin that told he knew the way of things. "But I can wait, I guess."

"The early part of our schedule is tough in the last of it," Peders had observed. "We've got to use Bucky a lot, you know."

"I know," Chris had agreed with a grin that was almost a leer. "It's okay, Coach."

ATER, Chris — Kiki and Ollie Peders talking together and he was aware the head coach's eyes swiveled more than once his way, and he guessed Ollie had been telling Kiki that the sophomore fullback wasn't dumb and knew how things had to be.

But it grated on him that his own folks talked about Bucky as if the much-publicized fullback were the whole team. He was surprised that his father, a college man himself and a football player of sorts in his day, swallowed that press-agent stuff and spoke of Bucky's performance with something akin to awe.

"Sure, sure, Dad, Bucky's all right," Chris had agreed, keeping the rancor out of his words with an effort.

"You did fine, too, Chris," his mother had cut in to say. "Just fine! Didn't he, Dorie?"

"My time will come," Chris had laughed. "Maybe not this year, but it will come. Brother, wouldn't I like to have that big varsity first-string line working ahead of me! But five of the seven graduate with Tyler next June. The lucky stiff!"

Chris hoped, of course, for a chance to work with the big line. "The Seven Killers," some sportswriter had dubbed Eastern's rugged line. But he knew now, as he suited up for the Midwest game, that it wouldn't be today. Midwest was as tough as any team on the schedule except for the final go against Northern State, which was an old rivalry and usually was anybody's game down to the final gun.

Bucky Tyler was just plain lucky that he was two years up on Chris and could keep the glory to himself.

"Lucky stiff," Chris muttered, as he stood up to strap his shoulder pads on.

"Who?" Lemmy Nixon asked from the next locker. "You?"

Chris grinned. "Why me?"

"Well, because there isn't much chance of my getting in the game today, Chris. Boy, is this going to be a dog fight! But you're the white-haired boy with Peders, so far as fullback on the third offensive platoon is concerned. What have you got that I haven't?"

"Savvy," Chris said. "Me, I'm smartened up, kid. That's one thing."

"What else?" the blond, giant Nixon challenged.

"Look, we haven't got all afternoon,"

Chris sighed. "Ask me when I got a spare weekend and I'll tell you a bit about it."

"Rats!" Lemmy laughed before he sobered suddenly. Then: "Hey, did you hear anything about Bucky having a sore side. Is there any truth in it?"

"I'll bet you," Chris said evenly, "that when the night editions hit the stands, Bucky Tyler will have all the headlines. Wanna bet?"

Nixon shook his head. "I'm glad to hear you say that, though, Chris. I had a screwy idea you—well, resented Bucky, maybe. Not exactly jealous of him, you understand, but—well, would like to have what he's got."

"I would," Chris murmured. "Boy, I would!" He didn't add what he meant: "His luck, I'd like to have."

Kiki was clapping his hands, was climbing up on a table to give with the pep talk. Chris let the others get ahead of him in the semicircle that formed in front of the head coach, and he felt vaguely pleased when he realized that Kiki was looking at him, Chris Stoffel, quite a lot as he gave his talk.

"This is one cracking team when it wants to be, and it had better want to be today," Kiki was telling them. "But get one thing straight—it is a team! I want you to know it and to play it that way. You boys up in the line especially. The papers may not headline you, but it wouldn't be a team without you. Without any of you." His eyes roved the group, came to rest on Chris. "And don't you subs go getting stale or burned up with impatience. Your time will come—"

Chris grinned openly at that, with the savvy that was in him.

"I didn't say anything funny!" Cranston roared, his face red and his eyes suddenly angry. "What's the big laugh about?"

Chris was almost stammering some dumb explanation when he realized that Kiki and the rest of them were looking past him rather than at him. He twisted his head.

Lemmy Nixon had been standing behind Chris, and Lemmy's broad face was crimson and his eyes chagrined.

"I—I wasn't laughing at you, Coach," Lemmy sputtered. "I—er—wasn't laughing at all, Coach. Just a nervous reflex, I guess, and you thought I was laughing."

Cranston let it go at that, but Chris twisted his head to stare back at Lemmy once or twice, wondering what the man had been laughing about? He certainly couldn't have any idea that he could fill Bucky Tyler's shoes so that nobody but the writers would miss the name in their sporting-page accounts of games!

Then what had Lemmy been laughing about?

After another look, Chris shrugged it off and turned his attention back to Kiki Cranston.

EASTERN BOWL was in the grip of a hurricane of sound when the third quarter of the epic Midwest game came to its savage end. But none of the noise came from Eastern's supporters.

Instead, the home-team crowd watched in glum silence while the polished Midwest attack, which had sputtered briefly through the two previous quarters, took fire and worked the ball downfield for the score that broke the 13-13 tie.

On the bench, leaning forward and tense with the drama of it despite his preknowledge that this, like all other Eastern games, was a Bucky Tyler starring-role, Chris marked the coming apart of the Eastern squad with wide eyes.

The defensive line was showing holes where grudging slots had been opening before. The center, roving close behind the defensive bulwark, got sucked in on a fake line smash and the ball was advanced on a jump-pass over the middle. Tyler might have got the runner at the twenty-five, but, instead, ran him out of bounds on the ten.

Another pass, two swift and pulverizing smashes, and then an eel-hipped Midwest back was dancing through the backfield, was spinning away from

Tyler's desperate lunge, was stepping cat-footedly away to let Bucky Tyler sprawl ignominiously on the turf and the score was in.

The Eastern regulars slumped to the ground for a rest before the try for point afterward, and when they straggled up to fight the one-point conversion Bucky didn't come up with them.

A silence fell over even the triumphant Midwest stands when the trainer and doctor and waterboy trotted out. Watching from the bench, Chris saw the setup was smart.

"We get a time-out without penalty," was the way he sized up Tyler's form on the ground. "He isn't that used up—not with our line taking most of the beating before it gets to his sector."

Nor could he help the feeling of mirth when, a little later, Bucky struggled up and walked a small circle supported by two mates.

"He sure can make it look convincing," Chris had to admit. "After a bit, he'll push his helpers away and insist on staying in, and he'll get a terrific hand and slightly bigger headlines."

Because no man could take that much of a beating that he would miss a tackle and not get up. Not with The Seven Killers up there to take the sting out of the attack before it trickled back to Bucky. It was simply that Bucky was a step slow and had missed his assignment. That was all it was.

It was good headwork to gain time, and it was good grandstanding to earn more cheers and more headlines. Bucky would come around slowly, would push his helpers away, and the stands would roar tribute when the gang lined up in front of Bucky near the goal line. That would be the way of it.

Chris looked up the bench to see how Kiki was taking it and caught the coach's eyes intent on him. He met the gaze a steady moment before he yawned and twisted his head back to watch the familiar finish of Bucky's act.

Down the bench someone was yelling something, but Chris kept his eyes glued

to Bucky. The fullback was making gestures as if to insist on staying in. The yelling persisted, came nearer, became clearer, personal.

"Stoffel! You, Stoffel!"

Lemmy Nixon punched Chris in the ribs with his elbow and said, "Wake up, guy, wake up! Kiki is paging you!"

"Huh? Me?"

"Get in there for Tyler, Chris," Ollie Peders barked, as he came along down behind the bench. "Try to block this extra point. Maybe if Bucky rests up we'll still have a chance to beat them. Get in there, boy, and don't let anything slip!"

Chris reached for his helmet, fumbled it, tried to jam it on his head and dropped it. Kiki Cranston came over to give him some instructions.

"Work that line over, especially the center trio," he ordered. "Forget the fancy stuff with the feet and work them over. Soften them up for Bucky, in case he can get back in there."

Chris steadied and got the helmet tied under his chin. This was the same old stuff. What was he getting excited about?

Cranston was saying some more. "This gang isn't a very green frosh outfit, kid, so don't let a few miscues bob up to chuck the game away for us. This is big-time. Play it safe, but play it tough. Now, go to it! And luck to you!"

Chris trotted out knowing all he needed was a little luck and they wouldn't even be thinking of putting Bucky back in the game. Not in this one, anyway. Of course, Eastern public relations had sunk a lot of talented publicity into Bucky Tyler, and maybe the next game they would be puffing the big guy again. But with some luck, not this game any more.

His pulses pounded as he raced out on the field in the growing roar of the stands behind him. Then he realized the cheers were for Bucky and not for him. But his pulses wouldn't let up. In his wrists, his throat, his temples, they jittered on.

He almost forgot to report to the official.

Big "Muley" Broughan got a hand on the ball when the try for point was attempted, and the score stayed Midwest 19—Eastern 13. Chris lined up with his mates to receive the kickoff.

SOMETHING was wrong. Something was very wrong. Chris blinked at the blue sky and puzzled at the cloud that showed in it suddenly. Then the cloud became a number of clouds, and the number of clouds became faces, and from one of the faces that stared down at him came a voice.

"What day is it, Chris? What's the date? Where are you?"

Chris blinked again and let his clearing eyes rest on "Buzz" Dessautell's grimy features, for it had been the quarterback's voice that asked those silly questions.

It was Wednesday, the twelfth. And he, Chris Stoffel, had fallen asleep by College Creek and—

"Hey!" Chris breathed, as his eyes cleared some more. "What—what went wrong?" He felt of his jaw tenderly, winced.

Dessautell persisted. "What's the date and where are you?"

"I'm flat on my back in the middle of Eastern Bowl," Chris responded dryly, as he pushed to get his feet under him. "It's the twenty-fourth of October and we're playing Midwest."

Then he remembered. "Doc" Riehle had taken the kickoff and was moving it upfield, with Chris and two others running interference ahead of him. Over the ten, the twenty, they roared. Over the thirty with the aid of a field-reversal. Across the thirty-five.

Chris had side-stepped then before blasting into a would-be tackler, and just as he left his feet the man had wheeled, cut back in and thrown a shattering block on the offbalance substitute fullback. And that was all that Chris could remember.

He got to his feet now and waited for

Buzz or for one of the others to say it, to gripe that if he had blocked that Midwest man out the ball might have gone on another ten or twenty or so. But nobody said anything except "Dip" Ryan, and all Dip said was, "Tough luck, kid. The guy just happened to get you right."

In the huddle, Buzz snapped his own signal for a pass far downfield that might catch Midwest napping. Thankfully, Chris trotted back and faked a lot of interest in the play while he rested up a bit. But he chided himself for his carelessness.

"How'm I going to run the ball anywhere if I get sloughed in a simple run-back play?" he thought.

He knew where the fault lay. He should have taken his man out in a straight, smearing buck instead of trying to handle it so he could get two. Instead, he had got nothing but a vicious blasting.

The play broke, and somehow the forwards who were The Seven Killers didn't look exactly right. Chris watched the play break up for no gain, and he checked the rugged line again to see what was wrong.

Nothing was wrong. They were intact, the famed Seven Killers, but they didn't look so formidable any more. Chris stared at the Midwest linemen and saw the reason why in the size of the men and their willingness to fight.

But he forgot all that when Buzz, in the huddle, called Chris' own signal for a delayed line smash after some backfield hipper-dipper with the ball.

"Powder 'em, Junior," Buzz snapped at Chris as the huddle was breaking away again.

Chris faded to his right when the handback came to Buzz, started as if to lead interference around the end, and then veered back and in, charging hard and with his arms hooked open for the ball.

He got it, was slamming for the small slot that opened up at center, and then shifted for between guard and tackle when that closed abruptly. Then the

stadium fell on top of him, or so it seemed.

Chris came up, but slowly. Buzz slapped him on the back and yelled, "Nice going, kid, nice going! Beat it back there and rest up a bit." But in the huddle he gave the same signal again.

"And hit where you are supposed to," he growled, his eyes on Chris. "If we are going places, it'll be through the line. They got our passing attack bottled up like nothing on earth. Hit that center threesome!"

"For Bucky," Chris thought as he nodded. "The lucky stiff! We work them over and then he just breezes!"

This time Midwest apparently figured the play for what it seemed, and when Chris got to the middle, with the ball cradled safely in his arms and hugged to his body, he cracked through the off-balance guards there and bored through, bursting into the secondary like a wild bull.

And then what was left of the stadium from that last brain-jarring smearing he got fell on him now....

THE STANDS were roaring and Chris thought he had scored, until he felt Buzz pound his back. He squinted at the side lines and then at the scoreboard, and the official confirmed it with a hand raised that showed one finger.

"Eastern, first and ten," the man chanted.

Buzz tried an end-around for a breather and made a yard. Then Chris was on the spot again. He looked briefly at the quarterback and away again. What did they think he was—a superman? Just how much blood did they think he owned, to shed it every other play for Dear Old Bucky?

"Hold it." Buzz checked the huddle break. He looked closely at Chris. "Can you do it? You bushed already, kid?"

"Gimme the ball," Chris said flatly.

The fake was to the left this time, with Chris stampeding hard for the middle and taking the pass just as two Midwest

men broke in to nail him. He was reconciled to go down, and then suddenly he wasn't reconciled to do anything of the kind.

He forced his feet under him again, bulled his head down, and by sheer fury carried the tacklers ahead four hard-fought yards with him before two more Midwesterners came in to stop him.

Second and four, Chris saw, as he wallowed on his feet in a sea of scrambled senses. A quarterback sneak almost made the distance as Buzz Dessauteil coolly took the ball in the handback, spun two complete turns with it, and then scampered through the baffled Midwest wall for two yards.

"Biff" Claghorn got the call from his left-half spot and was smeared for a one-yard loss when the enraged Midwest forwards poured through.

In the huddle, Buzz looked his despair and said, "We kick, and you know what that means. If we had Bucky here and in shape—"

The quarterback left the thought unfinished. Chris licked his bruised lips, met the man's eyes, looked away again, and then heard himself saying, "Gimme the thing! You guys think we got only one fullback here at Eastern? Gimme!"

"No," Dip Ryan said quietly. "Dunker" Milton, the captain and tackle, added his no, sharp and flat and final. "Let's kick. That way, we can stand them off from here. I mean, if that is as far as they run it back."

"Yeah, maybe," Buzz said. "Maybe doesn't win a ball game. We got to have time while Bucky gets his wind again." He blinked and looked around him. "Chris carries again, make or break. Let's go!"

Chris took the ball and headed for right end, then cut in behind the interference that formed and bulled for the wall. The interference evaporated as if by magic, and Chris had to hurdle a man to keep from stepping on his upturned face. He got his footing secure under him and as about to side-step an incharging tackler, when he re-

membered what had happened the last time he had tried that skip-step of his that had worked so well his freshman year.

He lowered a shoulder and grunted when the shock of the oncoming Midwesterner jarred him sidewise and almost over. But his cat-footed jump saved him, and he bulled ahead. Another man hit him, ricocheted off him, and then another. This one stayed with him and Chris went down.

The ball bobbed out of his nerveless hands and a roar went up from the stands. Midwest players yelled their glee and ran around slapping one another on the back.

But there had been a horn on the play and it was Midwest offside, and Eastern kept the ball and it was an automatic first down.

Red-faced, Chris begged for the ball again in the huddle, but Buzz shook his head and called "King" Kelley's signal for a surprise blocking-back carry. It worked for seven. Chris asked for it again, and Buzz shook his head. A quarterback sneak worked a yard. Chris asked for it again, and got it.

A moment later, as he saw the towering, savage-faced Midwest linemen bearing in for him with eager hands, he wondered why he had asked for it. It was a crazy thing to do. It was kid stuff. Why didn't he mind his own business and let Buzz run the team? Why should he want to soften up these human gorillas for Bucky Tyler? He should attend to his own knitting.

He had a momentary wild idea that maybe he could find an eligible receiver open and throw him a pass, get rid of the ball. But even if he had wanted to, it was too late now. He opened his mouth wide and roared his fury as he charged hard at the nearest of the tacklers.

SOMETHING had happened. The leading tackler was pinwheeling back and over and was taking the secondary helper with him. Chris felt a

[Turn page]

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thrill of pleasure hearten him, give strength to his spent legs.

He swerved and cut for the side lines, then stepped through a hole and cut back. But he was blocked and had to cut back sharply. He went on, hips weaving.

Twice he was almost stopped, but he kept on. He hammered a step ahead, two to the side, and again ahead. He felt an overpowering weight creep over his legs, mount his back, settle on his neck, and ride down the front of him. He staggered, fought, twisted, slowed to a stop, and fell. Fell crashing, and with the Midwest boys somehow finding another complete stadium to hit him with.

His last conscious thought was, "Did I score, or didn't I? Did I make that fifty yards, or was I just short of it?"

He looked up when he regained consciousness, and heard a rough, gravelly voice that couldn't belong to anybody but Kiki Cranston, the coach.

"What day is it, kid?"

Chris sighed. "Coach, I hate to admit it, but it's the same day and the dogged Midwest killers. Where am I?"

It was Ollie Peders who answered that. "Just stretched out and taking a snooze by the bench, kid. How you feel, okay?"

Chris pushed himself up. "Oh, yeah, sure! Yeah, I feel just swell! You want my helmet to go out and try yourself how I must be feeling?" He grinned back at Peders. "Did I—score?"

Peders swallowed and looked away. Coach Cranston laughed sympathetically. "That happened to me once, too, kid. Me, I went and went and went! And all I had chalked up was a yard. It a lot of running up and down the line and very little forward."

Chris gulped. "I—I made only a yard?"

That meant they lost the ball, maybe. That meant they had not made a first down, then. That meant Chris, for all his patronizing thought of Bucky Tyler and of waiting for The Great Day, had only gone a yard or less in what he thought was a terrific try.

"You made fifteen," Cranston said. "The way we needed it, it was like finding gold! You know, you surprised me, kid. Buzz told me you asked for the ball, and all the time I figured you thought you were better than Bucky and when you found out what it meant to go against a big varsity, you would fade and stay out of calling distance of your own signal. I guess I don't know how to figure any more."

Chris got to his feet and said, through a long cheer from the Eastern stands, "If you can coach like you can figure, we should have a very good season indeed, Coach. Hey, is that my name they are saying in that cheer?"

"It isn't mine," Kiki grinned, signaling a man to make room for Chris to sit by him on the bench. "Take it easy a bit, Chris, we may need you again if Bucky isn't able to carry the freight."

A flush of pleasure warmed Chris more than the blanket that eager hands had tucked about him and he twisted his head to look up into the stands. A flutter of a handkerchief marked where Dorie sat watching him. His mother waved. A grin was on his dad's face.

Chris swallowed and turned front again. Eastern had the ball on the Midwest twenty and big Bucky Tyler was taking it and plunging forward.

He was a step slow, Chris thought. And when he looked at the distance the ball had gone from where he, Chris, had had to leave it, and when he guessed the way it had gone down there—Tyler, Tyler, Dessauell, Tyler, Tyler, Dessauell, Tyler—he couldn't understand that one step slow, because almost any other human would have been six, ten, twenty steps slow.

"Gee, look at him sock!" Chris breathed in awe, when the big fellow tore into the Midwest forwards and burst through with two men hanging onto him.

Peders chuckled. "I saw a guy carry four men with him while he mined fifteen yards that we needed badly. Guy named Stoffel, come to think of it."

[Turn page]

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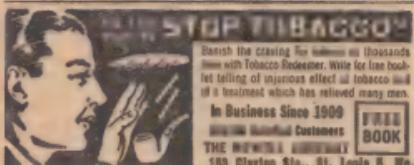
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Chris remembered the weights that had taken over his legs, climbed his back, jumped his chest, slid down the front of him.

The Eastern stands stood and roared and roared again when the linesmen advanced their sticks at another first down.

"Lucky," he murmured. "Just a lucky stiff!"

Kiki Cranston stared. "Bucky Tyler?"

Chris grinned swiftly. "No. I mean me. I'm lucky to be on the same team with a guy like Tyler. I'm also lucky I didn't get murdered out there."

"You're not the only one thinks you are lucky," Ollie Peders said. "Lemmy Nixon, he says you are just shot with it. When you got the call to go out, he gripped to me about it for five minutes without stopping. What you think, we ought to let him in and let him find out for himself how much luck it is when you get the headlines?"

Chris didn't answer. He couldn't answer. He joined the screaming, leaping, back-pounding bench when Bucky went over with a host of Midwest tacklers trying to stop him, and the board read Midwest 19—Eastern 19.

Buzz added the point-after, and when the final gun coughed flatly to close the contest and the team raced off the field with the cheers pouring down on them, Chris found himself paced by the hard-eyed Lemmy Nixon.

"Some guys have all the luck," Nixon grunted.

"You ain't kidding," Chris laughed. "You're not just saying that, Lemmy. Take Bucky, now."

"Yah," Lemmy growled, "I mean you! He's through this season. Wait and see, it'll be you with all the luck next year."

Chris didn't say a word. Chris just hoped Lemmy was right. Chris knew, after trying to fill Bucky Tyler's shoes for just a few minutes, that he was going to have to be very, very lucky to get away with it.

Then he was silent in awe, at what any man can learn in the tough going when he tries to follow another man.

THRILLS IN FOOTBALL

(Concluded from page 98)

and no man can do more. His unhappiness must be recorded, though, because it was one of the queerest happenings of the season.

THE LONG GAME

THE DESPERATION pass is not new to football. As a matter of fact, it came into evidence as soon as the aerial game developed. With time running out, and a team behind, why not take chances? If you are beaten, what does it



matter whether it is by one touchdown or two. Maybe the desperate chance will click. It has before and it will again.

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Princeton was on the forty yard line, and forty yards is a long way from a score. In a march from his own thirty Kazmaier had gambled with passes and won. No time for hitting the line now. He drifted back. George Sella was out on the left . . . and Dick hit him smack with a dangerously low pass that would have spelled trouble had it been intercepted.

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183H State St., Marshall, Mich.

Without obligation, please send your **FREE** BOOK on Rupture, PROOF of Results, and TRIAL OFFER—all in plain envelope.

Name
Street
City State
State whether for Man Woman or Child

**\$100.00 A WEEK in CASH
PAID DIRECT TO YOU**

FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

SAVE MONEY!

There's a big advantage in buying this policy by mail. Instead of waiting to see a doctor or agent for you—and that's another reason why we are able to offer so much protection for so little money.

**Policy Pays for a Day, a Week,
a Month, a Year—just as long as
necessary for you to be hospitalized!**

JUST LOOK The Large Benefit This Low Cost Policy Provides!

This remarkable Family Hospital Policy gives you and your family protection for almost everything for any kind of accident—and for all the common and rare diseases, and there are thousands of them. Serious diseases such as cancer, tuberculosis, heart diseases, diseases involving female organs, and abdominal operations are also fully covered after this policy is in force six months. Suicide, insanity, and terminal diseases are undoubtedly excluded.

The money is all yours—for any purpose you want to use it. There are no hidden meanings or big words in the policy. It is the kind of protection that will stand by you when emergency comes. We urge you and every family and also individuals to send for this policy on our 10 day free trial offer—and be convinced that no other hospital plan offers you so much for your \$1.00 a month!

TWO SPECIAL FEATURES MATERNITY

Benefits At No Extra Cost
Women who will some day have babies will want to have the same kind of low cost maternity ride. Pays \$50.00 for childbirth, \$100.00 for confinement in a hospital or at home. After policy has been in force for 6 months, double the amount on twins.

POLIO

Benefits At No Extra Cost
In lieu of other regular benefits policy pays these benefits for children under 18 years—
For Hospital Bills, up to \$1,000.00
For Doctor's Bills, up to \$100.00
For Hospital or at home, up to \$100.00
For Orthopedic Appliances, up to \$100.00
TOTAL OF \$3,500.00

3c A DAY IS ALL YOU PAY for this outstanding new Family Protection

Wonderful news! This new policy covers everyone from infancy to age 70! When sickness or accident sends you or a member of your family to the hospital—this policy PAYS \$100.00 PER WEEK for a day, a month, even a year... or just as long as you stay in the hospital. What a wonderful feeling to know your savings are protected and you won't have to go into debt. The money is paid DIRECTLY TO YOU to spend as you wish. This remarkable new Family Hospital Protection costs only 3c a day for each adult 18 to 59 years of age, and for age 60 to 70 only 4½c a day. This policy even covers children up to 18 years of age with cash benefits of \$50.00 a week while in the hospital—yet the cost is only 1½c a day for each child! Benefits paid while confined to any recognized hospital, except government hospitals, rest homes or sanitariums. Pick your own doctor. Naturally this wonderful policy is issued only to individuals and families now in good health; otherwise the cost would be sky high. But once protected, you are covered for about every sickness or accident. Persons covered may return as often as necessary to the hospital within the year.

This is What \$100.00 a Week Can Mean to You When in the Hospital for Sickness or Accident

Money melts away fast when you or a member of your family has to go to the hospital. You have to pay costs of hospital board and room—doctor's bills and maybe the surgeon's bill too... necessary medicines, operating room fees—a thousand and one things you don't count on. What a Godsend this READY CASH BENEFIT WILL BE TO YOU. Here's cash to pay for a long way toward paying many hospital expenses. And the money left over can help pay you for time lost from your job or business. Remember—all cash benefits are paid directly to you.

PAYS CASH BENEFITS REGARDLESS OF ANY OTHER HOSPITAL INSURANCE YOU NOW HAVE!

FREE INSPECTION... MAIL COUPON

The Actual Policy Will Come to You
at Once Without Cost or Obligation

THIS POLICY IS SOLD ONLY BY MAIL!
The Service Life Insurance Company
Hospital Department L-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska

Please rush the new Family Hospital Protection Plan Policy to me on 10 days Free Inspection. I understand that I am under no obligation.

Name.....

Address.....

City or Town..... State.....

SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

Hospital Department L-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska



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(Large, Sturdier—8" x 7 1/2" x 11 1/2")

**Electric
JIG SAW
SANDER
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**\$13.95
ONLY \$13.95 COMPLETE**

with POWERFUL BUILT-IN MOTOR, "Every Direction" Saw Blade Adjustment, Selection Guide, Cooling Fan, Air Vent, 3 Saw Blades, 3 Sanding Discs—**FULL-SIZE** project pattern.

Complete Portable Home Power Tool
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BUILT-IN AUTOMATIC BLOWER—To clear away sawdust and filings.

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LARGE CUTTING TABLE—Large, firm, working surface tilts 45°.

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3400 R.P.M. SANDING DISC WITH ADJUSTABLE TABLE—Revolves at constant high speed. Table tilts 45°.

PORTABILITY—Used in kitchen, study, garage or workshop. Cushioned base protects working surface and provides quiet operation.

UL APPROVED 6-FOOT PLASTIC CORD SET—Plug into 115-125 Volts AC outlet.

BURGESS GUARANTEE—Manufactured and guaranteed by Burgess Vibrocrafts, Inc., Chicago 2, Illinois.

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182 North Wabash Avenue • Chicago 1, Illinois

Send me my Burgess Electric Jig Saw, Sander, Filer with automatic blower, built-in rotary motor, 3 saw blades, 3 sanding discs and **FULL-SIZE** project pattern.

I enclose Check or Money Order for \$13.95. Burgess will pay delivery and handling charges.

Send C.O.D. I will pay postman \$13.95 plus delivery charge. (Illinois residents add 2% sales tax.)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zone _____ State _____



With the sewing pattern

Your Burgess Electric Jig Saw need not be bolted to a work bench. It's a complete portable home power tool in itself. And, what could be a more perfect gift for a friend or relative? Now is the time to place your order—Today!

READ THESE AMAZING FEATURES AND ORDER YOUR BURGESS ELECTRIC JIG SAW TODAY!

Yes, now you can have this wonder tool of the year—a highly functional, precision-built tool, portable for use in any room. Get one for your home and saw, sand, file, file metal, plastic and many other materials. This sturdy machine can be used up to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch and light metals up to $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Use it anywhere you want without worry of marring the working surface.



It's Easy and Fun to Make Many Attractive, Useful Things!

Make hundreds of useful things with this New 1951 Burgess Electric Home Workshop. A powerful tool for your home projects, yet completely safe for the youngster to use. Make many decorative things with the skill of an expert. A full-size shoeeshine box pattern comes with the saw.

With the sewing pattern, your Burgess Electric Jig Saw need not be bolted to a work bench. It's a complete portable home power tool in itself. And, what could be a more perfect gift for a friend or relative? Now is the time to place your order—Today!

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Pipe Rack and Holder



Knife and Fork Holder Rack

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